

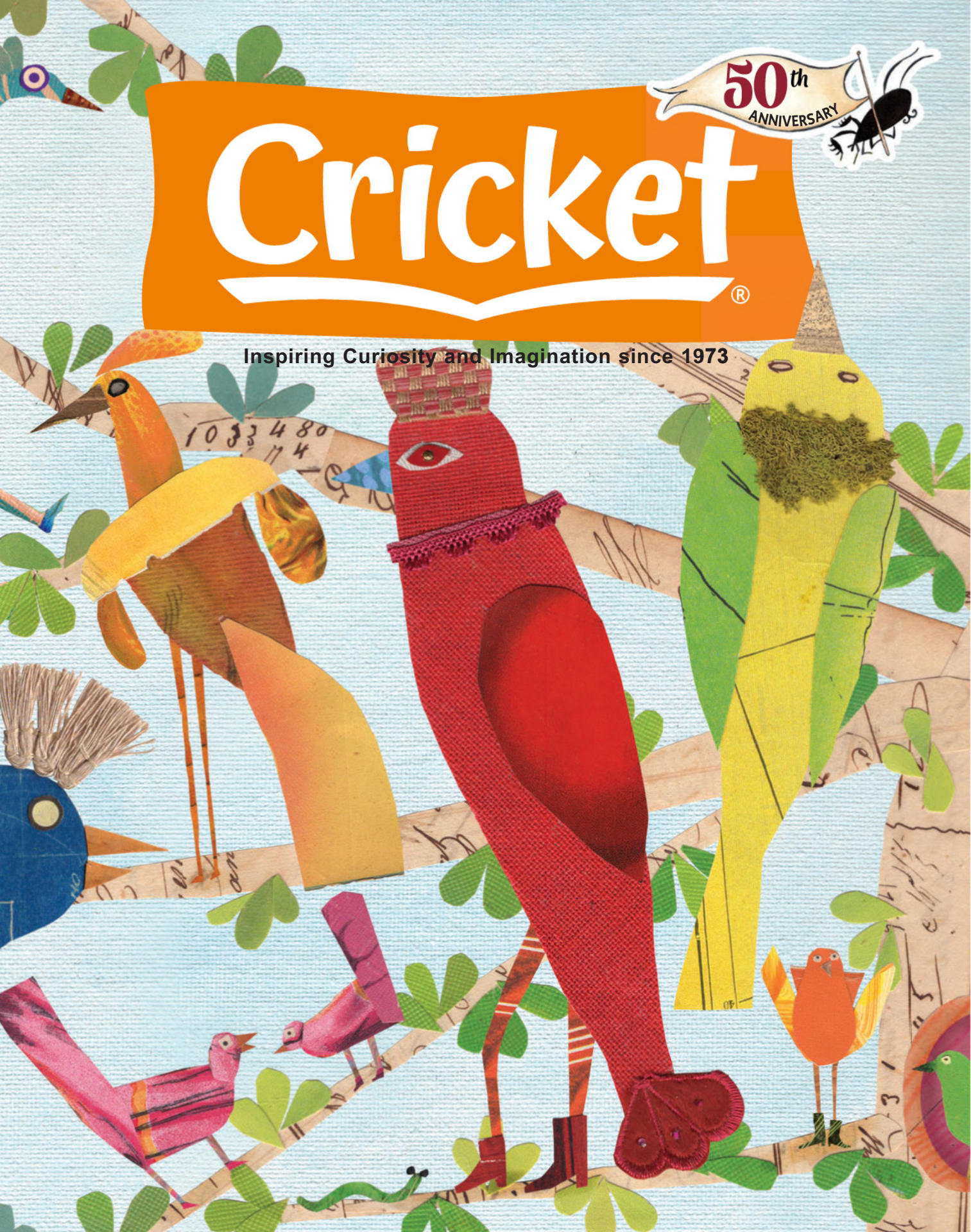
50th
ANNIVERSARY



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Inspiring Curiosity and Imagination since 1973



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Inspiring Curiosity and Imagination since 1973

April 2023 Volume 50 Number 7



COVER AND BORDER

by Susan Farrington

“The Fantastic Birds of Spring!”

*mixed media piece made with vintage papers,
fabric, ribbon, moss, pine needles, etc...*

I have been an artist for as long as I can remember. As a child I was encouraged by my parents to explore a wide variety of ways to be creative: taking classes in découpage, quilting, ceramics, woodworking, papier mâché, drawing, and painting, to name a few. These childhood experiences form the foundation of my love for working with mixed media.

An illustrator since the early Jurassic Period, I have created art for hundreds of magazines and newspapers. A cover for *Cricket* (HOORAY for this wonderful magazine!) led to a dream job in 2013 when I was commissioned by the MTA NY Arts for Transit and Design to create a large poster to be displayed in trains throughout New York City. It was seen by billions (with a ‘b’—holy cow!) of subway riders.

My MTA poster also won the Silver Medal from the Society of Illustrators in New York for advertising. My work has been recognized in *American Illustration*, *3 x 3*, *Print*, and *Communication Arts*, and is part of the permanent collection of the Museum of Transportation in New York. And . . . HarperCollins published my first children’s book, *What I Love About You*, in 2016! (Yipee!)

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Hello, Everyone!

I absolutely love your magazine; I've been getting it for four or five years now. I adore reading and am an incredibly fast reader. My absolute favorite book series is Harry Potter, but Percy Jackson and Keeper of the Lost Cities and The School for Good and Evil are pretty close. Midnight (November/December 2022), Team Foster-Keefe all the way! As an amazing sweatshirt that I want to get says: "Team Keefe: It's all about The Hair." I also love imagine-writing myself into books. I agree that it's so satisfying. I'm also in Gryffindor. The Dark Rose (November/December 2022), I also collect stickers and witchy stuff. Sparkly or natural, I don't care. Just give me something sweet and quirky, and I'll keep it.

I love writing and poetry and am on Student Council at my school. I love cats but I don't have any pets. When I grow up I'd like to be an actor, writer, or fashion designer, but since these are kind of "either you make a lot of money or you're totes broke" jobs, I'll probably do them as hobbies first.

Thank you, *Cricket*, for connecting so many people around the world so we can all be kooky bookworms together. Keep doin' your thing!

Rory, age 12
North Carolina

Dear Everybuggy,

I have never written to the Letterbox before. I am new to *Cricket* magazine. In the November/December 2022 issue, someone said their favorite first book sentence was from A Series of Unfortunate Events. I LOVE that series! I love cats and bunnies and I am obsessed with Christmas! It is soooo awesome!

Alice Loan, age 10
Jay, Vermont

Dear Muffin and Ladybug,

I looooooove your mags! Holy moly ravioli! They're soooo good! I recently started getting your mags and I love them. Ladybug, you're so bossy I don't like you. You are mean. Be nice to Cricket! Muffin, you're so sweet. Tell Pussywillow she's so cute.

John
Wooster, Ohio

**SOMEBUGGY'S
GOT TO BE IN
CHARGE, RIGHT,
PUSSYWILLOW?**

Mew!



Hello!

To answer Midnight's questions (November/December 2022), I'm also team Foster-Keefe 100 percent. I'm a Ravenclaw. I have way too many favorite Wings of Fire characters to put in this letter. I like cats, love dogs, I like to write and love to read. I'm going to read The Lunar Chronicles soon. I love the Letterbox because a lot of the people who write share my interests (like Midnight). Did you know that *Stellarlune* (the ninth KOTLC book) came out on November 8? I'm really excited to read it! Here are some book series recommendations: Harry Potter, Percy Jackson, Aru Shah, and City of Ghosts. Hope you like them!

Echo
San Juan, Puerto Rico

Dear Everybuggy,

Cricket mag is my favorite, and I always start reading it the second I get it. My favorite part is probably the Letterbox, because I like to see what other people are into. I love skateboarding and will read anything. Some of my favorite books are The Trials of Apollo, Echo North, and Keeper of the Lost Cities, all series.

Leon, age 13
New York, New York

Hello, Everybuggy!

This is my first time writing, and I am so happy that I finally decided to write. My sister was actually the one who convinced me. I am a sports lover and dog mom. I have two not-very-smart Vizslas and a neurotic German shepherd shorthair. Responding to Brooke L.'s questions about KOTLC (January 2022): Keeplie forever, but I feel like everyone gives Fitzphie too much beef; Gri-

zel and Sandor would never fight each other on purpose; Happy Shadow Thoughts!

Your magazine is awesome, and my favorite story so far has been "Katerina and the Bright Falcon" (January-May/June 2021). Keep making *Cricket*. It's awesome!

Vizsla mom, age 11,000 eons
Whitefish, Montana

**SOMETIMES I LIKE TO
JUST HOP-HOP-HOP
IN CIRCLES.
(WHAAAA. GETTING
DIZZY, NOW...)**



Hi, Everybuggy,

I love your mag! My favorite book series are Harry Potter, Keeper of the Lost Cities, and A Tale of Magic. I love boba, sloths, *Hamilton* the musical, theater, and randomly walking in circles! Dear Brooke (January 2022), I am 1) Foster-Keefe, 2) that's hard but... Grizel, 3) Happy Shadow Thoughts!

I was wondering who is everyone's fave character in KOTLC, because I am obsessed with that series. I love Keefe, Tam, and Ro. Also, I think Dex is awesome. Happy Shadow Thoughts, Keeper fans.

Miranda, age 11
Ashland, Oregon

I play clarinet and kind of, sort of, not really piano. Playing in a band is so fun! When I was in grade six I was the only clarinet in the whole band! Now in high school there are eight or nine of us, which is super great. We're doing chair placements next week, so I have to get to practicing.

Flamarestii
Down to Earth, Chatterbox

Hey, All!

I had band today. It was our first time practicing all together, and I was just surrounded by music in such a pleasant and exciting way. School's OK for now, but math class is looking like it will be tricky soon. I'm still really excited for everything music though, including the upcoming auditions for the school play.

Periwinkle
Down to Earth

I used to hate math when I was in middle school because I had a terrible time with algebra and felt like I would never be good with numbers. Later I took geometry and realized that I could learn to understand math. Taking chemistry and physics led me to appreciate more how useful it can be.

Just like with anything, it takes time and effort to become better at math, which is why homework and practice are important. I hated algebra and

**OOO, SCHOOL
PLAY
AUDITIONS!
MY NERVES
ARE ALL
A-FLUTTER!**



vowed never to take higher courses in math or go to college for anything that required it. This year I'm taking AP calculus and hope to go to college for a science or design degree.

I think math taught me that people sometimes hate things they don't understand, so the more you strive to understand, the more opportunity you have to appreciate the world around you.

Jwyn, age 17
Down to Earth

Hil!

I have some book recommendations. The Warriors series is awesome, and my brothers love Beyonders. My nickname is Dragon Lady. I love dragons and cats. I have two brothers. Our family pets are two guinea pigs named Nutter Butter and Violet, a cat named Noodle, two Madagascar hissing cockroaches named Gregor the Seventh and Gregor the Eighth, eight praying mantises, three goldfish, and lots of minnows. I know, it's a LOT.

To Pussywillow, you are so cute! To every-
buggy, what are your favorite hobbies?

Jane P., age 11
Houston, Texas

The really scary thing about climate change is how fast it seems to be spreading. I'm just a kid and I've already seen a lot of changes in the climate. Temperatures are hotter every year, there's less snow every winter, and worst of all, there are more and bigger wildfires every summer. I live in the West so we're always affected by the fires a lot; sometimes people we know have to evacuate, and then there are the depressing months of thick orange smoke. Just when I was in elementary school it was way better! At this rate, I don't even want to think about decades from now. . . .

Leila, age 11
Down to Earth

This is a thread about climate change. Climate change is not an opinion—it's a fact. Some ideas for how to help: Reduce, reuse, recycle. Take public transportation, carpool, walk, bike. Eat less meat. Do some research into the carbon footprint of

products that you buy and how they're made and packaged. Donate to organizations that help. Raise awareness; get people to care. Don't just do one thing—there are always more ways to help.

Feline Fantasy
Down to Earth

You're right, Feline Fantasy. Some more ways to help: Reduce water use (especially

YES! EXACTLY!
STRIVING TO
UNDERSTAND IS SO VERY
INTERESTING!



in your yard). Don't buy any food that you're not going to eat. Start composting. Plant a flower and/or vegetable garden. Pick up trash. (Trash not picked up from the ground eventually ends up in the ocean.) Turn off lights when you don't need them. Some of these might be really small things, but they will help. Thank you, Feline Fantasy, for raising this topic.

Sparkly Cat
Down to Earth

Thank you, Kika, for posting a thread to raise awareness of global warming and humans affecting the environment. Animals enjoy the simple things in life, while humans want power, money, and way more than they need. There are ways to help: 1) Plant a tree. If you don't have room for a tree, do some kind of plant with leaves. They soak up carbon dioxide and release more oxygen for animals to breathe. 2) Try to produce less waste. Don't use too much water and unplug the cord for charging when nothing is charging, because nowadays most electricity is produced using fossil fuels. 3) Write a letter to your state or regional representative or organize some kind of sponsored walk or bike ride, then donate the profits to a climate change charity.

Golden Lion Tamarin
Down to Earth

Writing Advice/Tips: I rarely plan in detail; I like to just let things happen. Ideas come to me while I'm writing, according to what will be interesting and help focus the plot. On the other hand, planning out chapter by chapter can be really helpful to make you focus.

Another thing I find useful is to imagine, as you're writing, that you're actually living in the scene you're describing. The same way as reading a book can transport you to another world, writing one can, too. Also, write the books that you want to read.

Read books by great authors. That can give inspiration and show you how to develop your style and characters at a higher level. Badly written books will influence your writing toward a "popular," sometimes shallow style; good literature will give your work more depth and vividness. Expanding vocabulary can also help. Practice using different narrative voices—the voice of an old magician will be quite different from a lady-in-waiting at Queen Victoria's court.

Don't strain after effect. Just write naturally without worrying about how it's going to come out. Follow your imagination, be amazed along with your readers at the power, strength, and quirks of your characters, and have fun roaming unknown lands!

Poinsettia
Inkwell, Chatterbox

CHIRPS FROM CRICKET'S LETTERBOX AND CHATTERBOX

For the past week or so, I've been seeing this tiny little Calico kitten at the door of one of my neighbor's houses. It's a glass door, and the border is just low enough that I can see the cat's chest and up. Every time my dog and I pass by it on one of our walks, I take a picture. After a bit, I started calling the kitten Callie, because it's a calico.

Raven
Down to Earth

It's amazing how much easier it is to write and compose music in French compared to English. My theory is that French naturally flows and blends words together more, resulting in a more continuous sound, which works better. English is a bit choppy.

Jaybells
Down to Earth

My cat is singing along with my dad, who is playing the piano. . . . LOL
Reuby Moonlight
Down to Earth

The word *forty* is the only number spelled with its letters in alphabetical order.

Wildfire
Chirp at Cricket

I LIKE
PLANTING GREEN
THINGS BECAUSE I
LIKE GREEN THINGS!



DOING
SOMETHING
FEELS GOOD!



CELEBRATING CRICKET!

Cricket turns fifty in 2023, and your Old Cricket wants all of you to help celebrate our golden anniversary, especially any of you who were loyal readers in Cricket's earlier years. We'd love to hear from you! Maybe you're a parent who remembers curling up with Cricket as a child. Or perhaps you're in college now, or embarked on your adult career, but still have fond memories of a favorite story or poem, or the antics of the bug gang. What did Cricket mean to you? Write to the Letterbox, and we'll publish as many of your letters as possible in the coming year. Perhaps somebuggy out there even remembers the thrill of getting the very first issue of Cricket in the mail. I know I do!

Love,
Old Cricket



Send letters to **Cricket's Letterbox**,
P.O. Box 300, Peru, IL 61354,
or email us at cricket@cricketmedia.com.
Letters may be edited for length.

Visit the Chatterbox at:
cricketmagkids.com/chatterbox



YAY, A GAMES DAY TO CELEBRATE SPRING!

Cricket Country

WHO WANTS TO ENTER THE THREE-LEGGED RACE WITH ME?

I'D LOVE TO, BUT I DON'T HAVE ANY LEGS.

BUT YOU HAVE SIX LEGS OF YOUR OWN!

MOST OF US HAVE TOO MANY OR TOO FEW LEGS.

MAYBE WE NEED A NEW NAME, LIKE "SHARED MOBILITY EXTREMITIES RACE!"

DOF! THAT'S A MOUTHFUL.

IF WE'RE MAKING UP NAMES, LET'S JUST MAKE UP OUR OWN GAME TO GO WITH IT!

THAT COULD BE FUN.

IN HONOR OF THE BIG ANNIVERSARY, WE COULD CALL OUR NEW GAME... CRICKET!



I'LL DO THE THREE-LEGGED RACE WITH YOU!



BUT THERE'S ALREADY A GAME CALLED CRICKET.

OH, YEAH. I KNEW THAT.

SOMEBUGGY STOLE OUR NAME!?

NOT THAT I WANTED TO CALL IT THAT, BUT...THE NERVE!

NOT AT ALL! THE GAME OF CRICKET HAS BEEN AROUND A LONG TIME!

EVEN LONGER THAN CRICKET MAGAZINE?

EVEN LONGER THAN THAT!

BUT WHAT SORT OF GAME WILL IT BE? SOMETHING WITH DRAMA AND FLAIR, I HOPE.

LET'S INVENT A GAME OF CRAFTY CUNNING AND DARING!

AND SCIENCE!

AND TEAMWORK!

PLUS A FEW RANDOM SURPRISES TO MIX THINGS UP! MY—I MEAN OUR—GAME WILL HAVE IT ALL!



READY FOR A DEMONSTRATION?

YES! LET'S SAY IT'S MY TURN FIRST...

BECAUSE... OBVIOUSLY. HA!

AHEM! AS I WAS SAYING...

I CAN EITHER PICK A CARD, WHICH MIGHT GIVE ME A LUCKY BREAK, A MISADVENTURE, OR SPECIAL POWERS...

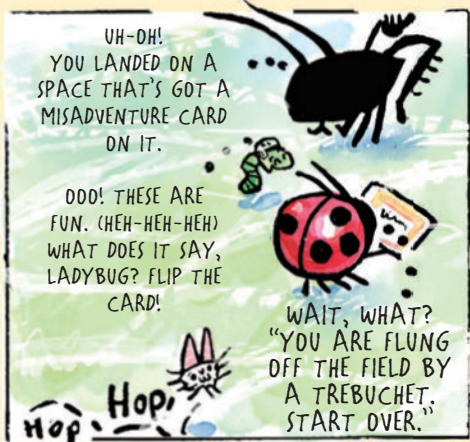
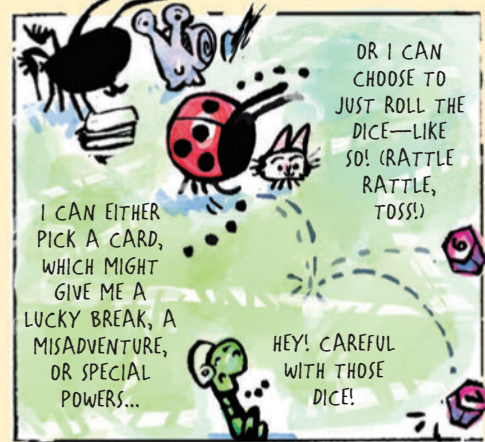
OR I CAN CHOOSE TO JUST ROLL THE DICE—LIKE SO! (RATTLE RATTLE, TOSSE!)

HEY! CAREFUL WITH THOSE DICE!

UH-OH! YOU LANDED ON A SPACE THAT'S GOT A MISADVENTURE CARD ON IT.

OOO! THESE ARE FUN. (HEH-HEH-HEH) WHAT DOES IT SAY, LADYBUG? FLIP THE CARD!

WAIT, WHAT? "YOU ARE FLUNG OFF THE FIELD BY A TREBUCHET, START OVER."



A TREBUCHET?

(HRUMPH!) WHAT'S THAT?

THIS IS A DEMONSTRATION ROUND, SO...

Stomp-Stomp!

NEVER FEAR, WE'VE GOT THE MECHANISM RIGHT HERE!

WE BUILT IT FOR THE LAST SCIENCE FAIR.

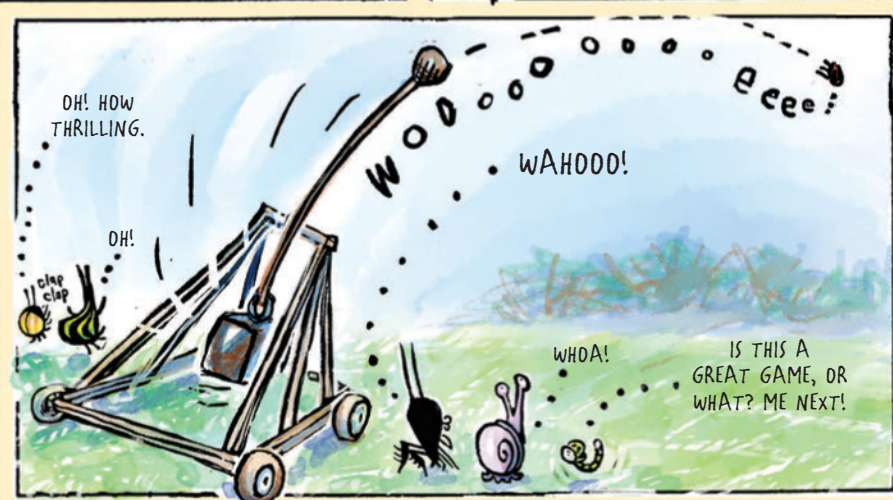
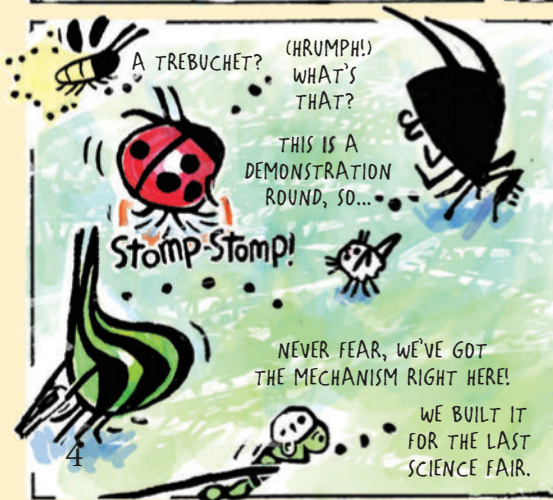
OH! HOW THRILLING.

OH!

WAHOOO!

WHOA!

IS THIS A GREAT GAME, OR WHAT? ME NEXT!



DOVE WATCH

by Richard Giannotti

Monday, March 17

The pigeon made me late. It caught me on my way out, standing in the old mint pot on the fire escape outside our apartment's kitchen window. A shiny patch on its neck like soap bubble rainbows grabbed my eye. I didn't know feathers could shine that way. We stared at each other for a handful of heartbeats, close enough to touch except for the glass. It was a prettier pigeon than the ones eating trash on the street.

The street door buzzer buzzed three times. I jumped. The pigeon flew off.

It was Mom waiting downstairs, telling me to hurry up, because guess what? We were late.

Scott sighed all dramatic, eyeing me like a hall-way monitor from his dog bed. I gave him quick pats.

"Later, Scott."

Tuesday, March 18

The pigeon came back after school. I watched it awhile, until Scott leaned against my ankle. "See the bird?" I asked. His tail wagged a little, and he sniffed the window. I gave him pats.

There's a photo by the front door of me and Scott as a puppy. I'm pre-pre-K and smiling, with a black puff of fur the size of a grapefruit in my lap. Scott's the fur puff. You can't see it in the photo, but he's smiling back at me. He's a good dog.

We watched the pigeon most of the afternoon, between pats and homework. It sat in the mint pot the whole time, blinking at us. We blinked back. I've never met such a friendly pigeon.

I set the table for dinner as Mom put out food for Scott. He barely ate, but he'd had a big lunch. That happens sometimes.

I'M A-A-FRAID
OF PIGEONS.



DON'T WORRY. THIS
ONE'S FRIENDLY.

Illustrated by Kristen Willis

text © 2023 by Richard Giannotti, art © 2023 by Kristen Willis



THAT'S A DOVE, NOT A PIGEON.
(BUT THEY ARE IN THE SAME
FAMILY OF BIRDS.)



AND A BIRD IS A BIRD
IS A BIRD, SAYS THIS
LITTLE OL' WORM.

Thursday March 20

It's not a pigeon. It's a dove. Two doves, actually. I saw them again today, same pot. Mom saw them, too.

"Morning doves," she said as one cuddled its neck against the other. She thinks they're nesting. We watched them until Scott pawed my ankle.

"Want pats?" I asked. My voice gets higher when I talk to Scott. He did his head shake that means yes, he wants pats. "Good boy." I lifted him into my lap. "Morning pats and morning doves."

Scott smiled.

Friday, March 21

"Why're they called morning doves if they're awake all day?" I asked.

"Not morning, like when you get up," Mom said.

"*Mourning* with a 'u'—like at a funeral. They're called mourning doves because of the cooing sound they make." She stopped stirring water into Scott's food bowl.

"Listen."

We did, and we heard them—*cooOOO-woo-woo*—like an owl remembering someone that wasn't around anymore.

Mom stood and grabbed her keys. I put my forehead on the top of Scott's head and rubbed his body with both hands. "CooOOO-woo-woo," I whispered. He gave me a kiss, wet tongue on my chin. "Later, Scott." I looked out the window and blinked. "Later, dove."

The dove blinked back.

Sunday, March 23

I looked up mourning doves last night instead of doing math. Here's what I learned.

Mourning doves mate for life. Both help build the nest and both sit on the eggs, usually the dad during the day and the mom at night. You can tell them apart by their colors. His breast is rusty, and he's the one with the soap-bubble feathers on his neck. Their wings make a funny, squeaky sound, like giggling chipmunks, when they fly, and they almost always lay two eggs, which take about two weeks to hatch.

WHAT DOES A
GIGGLING CHIPMUNK
SOUND LIKE?



(HE-HE) DON'T
YOU
KNOW?
(GIGGLE,
GIGGLE.)



Oh—I saw the eggs! After sunset, but before it got dark. The mom dove arrived, and her chipmunk wings pulled me to the window. “Look, Scott—eggs.” I whispered, holding him up as the dad dove moved off the nest. They were perfectly white, just a little bigger than my thumb, and strangely pointed at one end. The mom dove eyed Scott and me as she settled over her eggs to brood. That’s what they call sitting on the eggs—brooding. She tilted her head left, and her tiny chest inflated. *CoooOOO-woo-woo*.

Scott kissed the window, a little lick, but the dove didn’t flinch. I guess city birds are used to seeing giants hanging out on the other side of windows.

Thursday, March 27

Haven’t watched the doves in a few days. Too much math.

Scott’s at the vet tonight. Mom says they’ll figure out why he’s not eating and help get his energy back. I hope so. He’s old, but not *that* old. Not yet.

Saturday, March 29

Whatever the vet did worked! Scott ate dinner last night and breakfast this morning. On our walk, he pulled at his leash like a young dog. We walked longer than normal and could’ve gone even longer, except for the rain.

It came down hard, all at once, so I picked up Scott and ran home. We were soaked and shivering by the time we made it back. Mom made tea and helped rub Scott dry. He loved it.

We watched the dove that afternoon. A bird sitting in the rain is not exciting. The dad dove puffed up from the cold so much he looked like a fluffy pine cone, but the eggs stayed warm.

Monday, March 31

This morning a crow landed on the fire escape, above the dove’s nest. It looked at me, then at the nest. Then it attacked.

I watched it happen, cereal halfway to my mouth. It jumped down on the dove and both of them started flapping around, banging against the window





SHOO! GO
AWAY, CROWS!

and striking at each other. I ran over and knocked the glass to scare off the crow, but both birds flew away. The crow flew up over the neighbor's roof. The dove flew down. I didn't see where.

The eggs stayed behind. They were bright white, almost glowing, screaming to be eaten. My breath fogged the window. I could protect the nest if anything threatened the eggs, but that might scare off the parents for good. I could feel my heart racing faster the longer nothing happened.

Scott leaned on my ankle, so I lifted him into my lap, keeping eyes on the eggs. "They'll be fine, don't worry." My fingers ran through his fur, from his shoulder down across his back and up again, over and over.

"Ready?" Mom asked. She grabbed our lunch bags from the fridge. It was time to go.

"No!" I couldn't wait all day not knowing what happened. "The eggs, they're—"

Giggling chipmunks on the fire escape cut me off.

I spun around. The mom dove sat on the rail as the dad dove settled on the nest. He blinked at me. I blinked back.

"Let's go." Mom walked to the door.

I put Scott in his bed. "Thanks for the pats," I told him. He's a good dog.

Tuesday, April 1

Scott looked bad today. He lay on his bed all afternoon, panting like he'd just finished a run. Didn't eat, either.

We did pats after dinner. His tail slid back and forth on the floor, just a few inches, like a tired windshield wiper.

Wednesday, April 2

We dropped Scott at the vet this morning. I gave big pats to make sure he knew how good a dog he was. His tail said he understood. At lunch, Mom texted he'd be staying overnight. Good, I figured. Whatever they did last time helped.

I watched the nest after school to see if the eggs had any cracks. It's two weeks tomorrow since our doves sat in the mint pot. I hoped they could wait a little longer. I didn't want Scott to miss them hatching.

But Mom got a call during dinner. It made me jump. We had a rule about phones at the table—it was 'no.' Before I could ask why she broke the rule, she stood up and walked away. I heard her answer. "Dr. Tuftman?"

That's Scott's vet.

Thursday, April 3

Scott died last night, before we got to the vet's office. He was only ten.

The birds didn't hatch.

Saturday, April 5

I cried in school yesterday, walking to lunch. The photo of puff-ball Scott popped into my head, in the middle of the hallway, and I couldn't stop the tears. It was messy crying, so hard I could barely breath. Some eighth graders looked at me like I was broken, so I ate lunch in the nurse's office. Mom picked me up before I finished. We got a milkshake at Galaxy Diner on the way home, and I felt a little better, but not fixed. Scott being gone can't be fixed.

I sat by the fire escape the rest of the afternoon, nothing in my lap, not feeling like moving. I held so still the dad dove barely looked at me.

Sunday, April 6

On Sunday mornings the city outside my window makes a low *shhhhh* sound like the ocean in a shell. No traffic, no construction, no trash trucks. All I heard this morning was a siren, somewhere far off, and I hoped whoever needed it would be OK. I heard our doves, too: *cooOOO-woo-woo*. My eyes got wet because they sounded like how I felt, like they knew something about the tightness in my chest where Scott used to be.

CooOOO-woo-woo-woo.

I found the dove mom on her nest, blinking at me. I blinked back. The eggs would hatch today, they had to, and I'd be there when they did. Dove chicks are ugly in the pictures I saw, but in a cute way. In two weeks, they'll be as big as their parents, ready to leave the nest.



I brushed my teeth, washed my face and made a bowl of cereal that I accidentally filled to the brim with milk. It spilled on the way to my dove-watching chair, but not too much. I glanced at the nest as I sat and almost choked.

They were gone.

My bowl of cereal shattered on the floor.

The doves, the eggs—they were all gone! It was just an empty nest.

“Honey?” Mom called.

I didn’t reply. The window’s glass felt cold against my forehead. Maybe the eggs fell just behind the pot. Maybe I could put them back.

“What’s wrong?” Mom asked.

I opened the window and looked out. They weren’t behind the pot. They weren’t smashed on the concrete two floors down, either. Could the chicks have hatched and flown away? Did the crows come back? But there weren’t even any empty shells, they were just . . .

I turned to Mom. “They’re gone.” Hearing it out loud got me crying hard all over again. Not sad like with Scott, but it wasn’t fair, losing them both back to back.

Mom hugged me until I finished, saying stuff about how it’s natural and that sometimes nests don’t work out. “Maybe the doves decided to build a new nest,” she said between hugs.

The hugs helped, but the words didn’t make me feel any better.

Saturday, April 19

Haven’t wanted to write. Nothing to write about.

The doves disappeared two weeks ago. Scott died four days before that. I got tired of feeling sad every time I saw his empty bed, so today we packed all his stuff up into a push cart and rolled it to the park. Everything but his leash and his bowl. Those went in my closet.

At the park, we walked through a farmer’s market full of people smiling and laughing and walking their dogs. We stopped at a tent for the local rescue center, where an older lady made of smiles took Scott’s stuff. I told her how Scott had passed, but his stuff was still good. Maybe other dogs would like it.

Her smile disappeared. She leaned forward a little and whispered, “Would you like to know a secret?”

I nodded.

“A litter of Scotties came in last week. We have two left that need a walk, if you know anyone interested.”

THAT’S SAD.
I HOPE IT
WASN’T THE
CROWS.



STAY
CLOSE,
PUSS!

The lady smiled as she asked, and I smiled as I nodded, and Mom was smiling, too. We walked the shelter puppies—Rosco and Greg—for an hour wearing orange ‘adopt me’ vests. They were young versions of Scott, little fur puffs like from the photo by the front door, all full of bouncy energy.

Near the end of our hour, we were ambushed by a bunch of parents with babies and yoga mats. Mom showed them Greg while Rosco and I played in the grass. I rubbed his belly, and he pushed at my hand with his stubby legs. A pigeon landed near us, perched eye level on a bench, looking at me. It blinked. I blinked back. Then I laughed. One month ago, I thought doves were pigeons.

“Ow!” Rosco bit my finger. Hard. “No!” I pointed at him, and he smiled, ready to play. I couldn’t help smiling back. One month ago, Scott was still alive. He was a good dog.

When we got home, Mom started cleaning out the mint pot, but I stopped her. Lots of doves live around our building, and each pair raises four to five broods a year. Sometimes they use other bird’s empty nests. So . . . who knows?

I sprinkled seeds around the mint pot to sweeten the deal, just in case.



I NEED A HUG, MY SWEET
ADOPTED MAGIC KITTY!

MEWY ME, TOD! (SNIFF)



THE FEEL OF Spring

by Goldie
Olszynko Gryn

no daffodils
no trilliums
no daisies
by the billions
no lillies
or sweet Williams
until it feels like spring

PROFESSOR NAISMITH'S

"TOUCH YOUR TOES! Bend your knees! Up and down!" Ernest grumbled bitterly. "Over and over and *over* again! Wouldn't it drive *you* out of your mind?"

Jimmie didn't bother to reply as he stumbled along behind his brother on their way to the YMCA. It was just too cold to talk, this December day in 1891. Besides, Ernest was only complaining about his physical education class again.

"Football," Ernest went on, "is worth coming to class for. So's baseball. But what can you do when the playing fields are frozen and covered with snow? You're stuck in the gym, lifting dumbbells. One-two, one-two! What fun!"

Jimmie was proud of his older brother, most of the time. Ernest had been only eighteen when their father died, and he'd

been working hard to take care of the family ever since. He was attending the International YMCA Training School in their hometown of Springfield, Massachusetts, studying to qualify as a future YMCA director. But now he had this gym class. For weeks, they'd been doing nothing but gymnastic drills and calisthenics. Class was boring, and Ernest hated it. Jimmie was just tired of hearing about it.

"I'm not the only one who's fed up, either," Ernest was saying. "We're grown men in this class, not kids. If something doesn't change soon, everyone's going to—" He broke off. They had entered the gymnasium.

Jimmie pulled off his coat and scarf, glad to be out of the wind. He gazed around. The gym was built like a fortress, with high



Illustrated by Adam Larkum

NEW GAME

by Jessica Van Dessel

windows and thick walls. A narrow balcony, about ten feet above the floor, ringed the entire room. Along the walls were racks of dumbbells and heavy wooden exercise clubs.

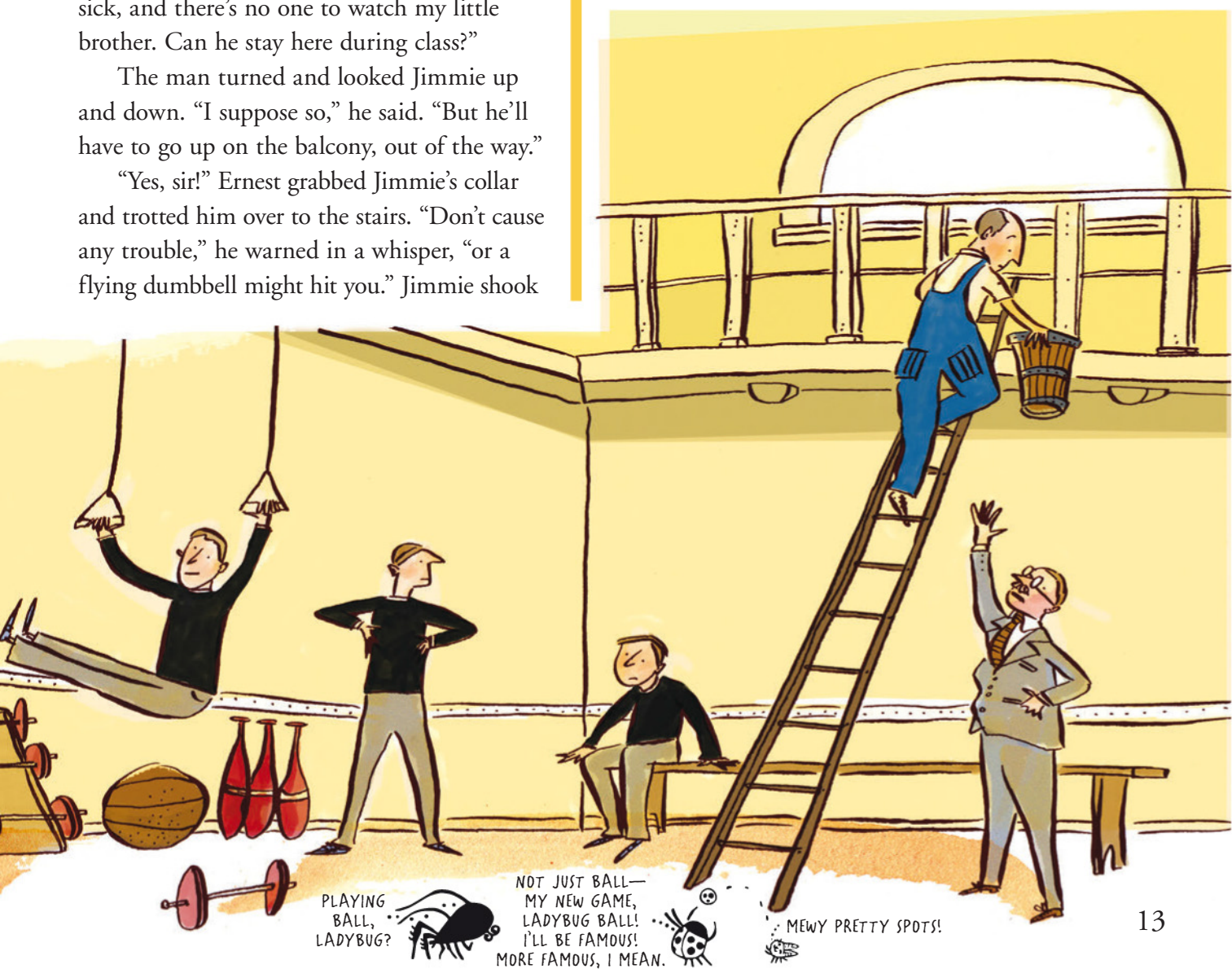
With Jimmie tagging behind, Ernest crossed the gym to where a big man with a mustache was directing the janitor up on a ladder. “Professor Naismith?” Ernest placed his hand on Jimmie’s shoulder. “My mother’s sick, and there’s no one to watch my little brother. Can he stay here during class?”

The man turned and looked Jimmie up and down. “I suppose so,” he said. “But he’ll have to go up on the balcony, out of the way.”

“Yes, sir!” Ernest grabbed Jimmie’s collar and trotted him over to the stairs. “Don’t cause any trouble,” he warned in a whisper, “or a flying dumbbell might hit you.” Jimmie shook

himself free and shot up the stairs. He was tired of Ernest treating him like a baby. He strolled around the balcony until he reached the other side of the gym, far away from his brother. Then he hung his arms over the railing and surveyed the scene below.

There were eighteen adult students in the class. Most of them looked to be in their twenties. Each wore a gym uniform—gray





woolen pants and a long-sleeved black jersey. Jimmie waited for them to line up and start the boring exercises Ernest had described. Instead, Professor Naismith gathered them and held up a soccer ball.

"Today," the professor announced, "we're going to try something new."

Groans echoed through the gym as the class anticipated a new drill. Naismith gestured for silence.

"A few weeks ago, the athletic department director presented me with a challenge: invent a new game. It could be any kind of game, as long as it could be played indoors without damaging either the players or the facilities—and as long as it was more enjoyable than these endless exercise drills." Professor Naismith grinned, and the class muttered agreement. "I had fourteen days to invent the

game. Well, today's the deadline, and all I've got is a half-baked idea I thought up at three o'clock this morning. But we're going to try it anyway!"

"This will be a game of skill rather than strength! It will be fair to all players! The object is to throw *this* ball into one of *those* baskets." Professor Naismith pointed in Jimmie's direction. Jimmie looked down; nailed to the lower edge of the balcony, just below his feet, was an empty peach basket. A second basket was nailed up on the opposite side of the gym.

Professor Naismith took a sheet of paper from his pocket and read out the rules of his new game. The ball could be thrown or batted in any direction. A player could not run with the ball. He had to throw it from the spot where he caught it. Pushing, tripping, and tackling were forbidden.





Jimmie liked what he heard. This sounded like a game he could play.

“Break into two teams of nine,” Naismith said and walked to the center of the gym. Buzzing with interest, the class followed him.

“The game will start when I release the ball. One . . . Two . . .” Jimmie leaned forward, gripping the balcony rail as the professor counted. “THREE!” Naismith flipped the ball straight up into the air. With wild yells, eighteen bodies lunged after it.

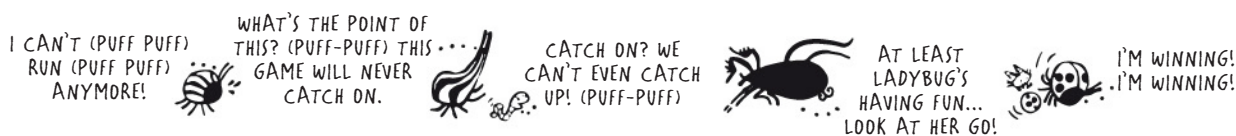
One man grabbed the ball. He stood in place while his teammates ran toward their basket, shouting for him to pass it. The opposing players jumped around with raised arms, hoping to block or intercept the ball. Jimmie raced around the balcony, trying to keep up with the action as the ball passed

among the men below. When a large, red-haired man on Ernest’s team got the ball, he looked down the court and threw it with one hand straight at the goal. It sailed under the basket and out of bounds.

PHWEET! Professor Naismith blew his whistle. “Pass the ball!” he shouted. “Pass it to a teammate who’s closer to the basket!”

The first player to reach the ball tossed it back onto the court. Then Ernest got the ball. He tried to pass it to a teammate closer in, as Naismith instructed, but an opponent grabbed it in midair, turned, and heaved it wildly toward his own goal. The ball missed by a mile and bounced beneath the balcony. Five men went for it at once, smashing into the equipment racks. *CRASH!* Dumbbells rolled all over the floor.

PHWEET!



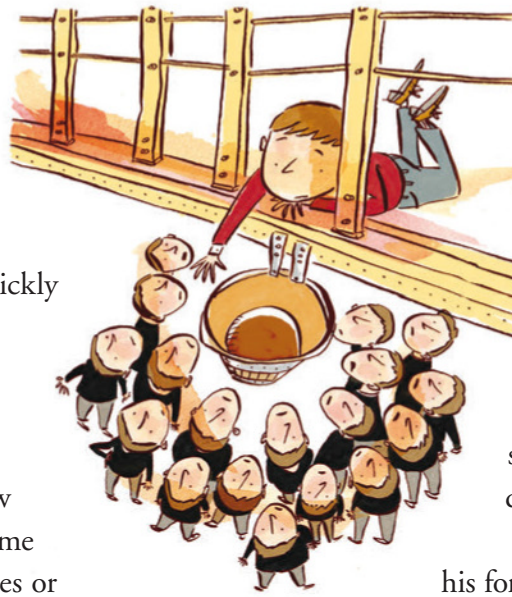
"Time out!" Naismith called. "Let's pick this up!" Both teams dashed over to clean up quickly so they could continue the game. Soon the ball was back in play.

Although Professor Naismith often had to blow his whistle and stop the game as the players broke the rules or crashed into each other, Jimmie thought the men were getting a little better at moving the ball around. The class was certainly getting a lot of exercise! Nobody was quite sure what he was supposed to be doing, but they were all doing it as hard as they could anyway.

Now the ball belonged to a fellow named Bill Chase. Holding it above his head, he ducked to dodge an elbow—then realized he had an open shot to the basket. With both feet flat on the ground, Chase aimed carefully, then pushed the ball from his chest with two hands, lobbing it softly through the air on a high arc. Jimmie held his breath. The ball swooped down, teetered on the rim of the basket, and fell in.

"Yes!" Jimmie shouted with joy. Ernest's team erupted in cheers, while the opposing players good-naturedly tried to boo them down. Professor Naismith placed his hands on his hips and smiled broadly.

Then the cheering and shouting died away. Jimmie looked down. Eighteen faces were staring up at the balcony with puzzled



expressions. They'd just realized something.

The ball was in the basket.

The basket was ten feet off the ground.

"After we score a goal, sir," someone ventured, "how do we get the ball back?"

Professor Naismith rubbed his forehead. "I guess we'll have to borrow the janitor's ladder again."

But before the janitor could come plodding back in, Jimmie had an idea. He knelt down above the basket and stretched his arms through the balcony rail. He could just touch the ball with his fingertips, but it was enough. He pulled the ball up and pushed it over the rim.

Both teams hurraed as the ball dropped down and bounced across the floor. Everyone scrambled after it. CRASH!

PHWEET!

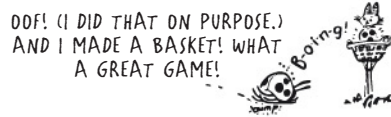
"We're out of time!" Naismith announced. "Class is over." He grinned at their disappointed faces. "Don't tell me you actually *enjoyed* our session today!"

Jimmie didn't want the game to end, either. As he came slowly down the stairs, Ernest smiled at him, proud that he had helped out.

"What do you call your game, sir?" Bill Chase asked, still puffing from the exercise.

Naismith shrugged. "I hadn't thought about a name. Gymnasium-Ball, perhaps?"

"That's too dull for such a good game," the red-haired fellow said. Jimmie agreed.



An exciting sport like this should have a really good name, something with a lot of bounce that caught the whole spirit of the game.

“How about Naismith-Ball?” someone suggested. The professor waved that away with a snort.

As the class filed out, Jimmie listened to the men discussing ways to solve the problem of retrieving the ball.

“If there was a string you could pull, to tip the basket and shake the ball out . . .”

“Or if you poked a long stick into the basket, maybe you could push the ball out . . .”

Jimmie frowned. He had a feeling they were all missing a perfectly simple solution.

“I can get an old basket,” Ernest was saying, “and nail it up to the haymow in our barn. Jimmie, old pal, I’ll need to borrow your soccer ball.”

“Only if I can play, too!”

Jimmie couldn’t wait to show his friends the new game. He knew they’d love it. And they would show their friends, and those friends would show friends, until pretty soon, everyone would be playing it.

Basket-Ball, Jimmie thought. That’s what we ought to call it. 

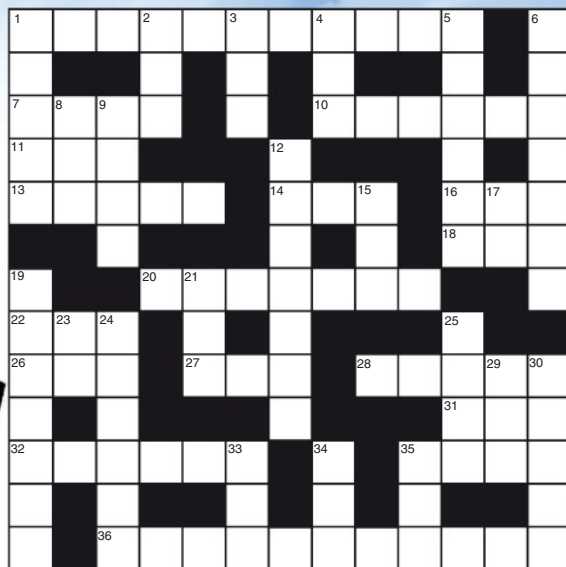
HISTORICAL NOTE Although James Naismith had studied to become a Presbyterian minister and had earned degrees in philosophy and theology, his first love was athletics. As a student at McGill University in Montreal, Canada, he had excelled at the rugged sports of rugby, football, and lacrosse. He later wrote that he had approached the problem of inventing a safe indoor sport by analyzing those and other popular outdoor games of the time. Every game had a ball, and he reasoned that a large ball, as used in soccer, would be less hazardous when batted or thrown than a small, hard ball like a baseball. To avoid rough tackling, as in football and rugby, he did not allow running with the ball in his game. By placing the goal high above the ground, he encouraged players to lob the ball softly, not hurl it with force. And no crowd of pushing and shoving defenders would form to guard a goal that was way above their heads.

Naismith originally planned for the ball to be thrown into boxes, but the janitor at the YMCA couldn’t find any, so they used half-bushel peach baskets instead. The game

changed in other ways, too. Dribbling got started after a few years, when players hit upon the idea of passing the ball short distances to themselves. They would toss or bounce the ball, move a few feet, and then catch it. Naismith heartily approved of the innovation.

As Jimmie predicted, basketball grew quickly in popularity, but Naismith, who became the first basketball coach at the University of Kansas in 1898 and headed its athletic department until 1937, always refused to profit from his invention of the game.

The first basketball game really was played at the Springfield YMCA, on December 21, 1891, and the first, and only, basket was made by Bill Chase. Jimmie is a fictional character, although school-age kids would often come to watch the games from the gym balcony and toss the ball down after a goal. Eventually players realized that cutting the bottom out of the basket was the easiest way to get the ball back—but it would take them twenty-one years to figure it out!



Solution on page 47

Across

1. Racket game played on a walled court with a small, hard ball
7. Zero score in tennis
10. World Cup game
11. Avenue (abbreviation)
13. Football gains are measured in _____
14. Short for *abdominal muscles*
16. Female sheep
18. Religion (abbreviation)
20. English ball game played with bats and wickets
22. The triple jump is also called _____, step, and jump
26. George Gerschwin's brother
27. Used to reduce swelling in a sports injury
28. Slang for *basketball*
31. Rim of a golf hole
32. Racket game played with a net and a hollow, fuzzy ball
35. Double Dutch is a jump _____ game
36. Gymnasts take off from this when vaulting

EK! SPIT-
SPATTERING
WHISTLE
COMING
THROUGH!



Down

1. Footrace in which a baton is passed
2. Quebec (abbreviation)
3. Earned run average (abbreviation)
4. Sports teams often travel by _____
5. Gym closet
6. Weightlifting equipment
8. Plural of *ovum*
9. Bobsledding is a _____ dangerous sport
12. Player behind home plate
15. Look at
17. Us
19. Referee's noisemaker
21. Runs batted in (abbreviation)
23. "It's not whether you win _____ lose, but how you play the game."
24. A machine _____ the lines on a football field
25. Ball game played on horseback
29. British slang for "defeat an opponent"
30. Swiftness
33. A type of fiction: _____-fi
34. Cooperative professional wrestling: _____ team
35. River in southwestern U.S.: _____ Grande



By Shouty Castellón
& Yelly Conahan

GOTTA HAND IT TO UGLY—HE
KNOWS HOW TO MAKE A BUG JUMP!



SHOOTING HOOPS WITH DAD

IT'S STILL LIGHT out, and Dad isn't home yet. He works all day cleaning pools. In South Port, Florida, that means a lot of pools. Mom tells us we need to wait for dinner so all of us can eat together. Even when Dad doesn't get home until after eight or eight thirty, usually on days when he has to clean the municipal pool, I don't mind. If Dad's late, it means I can spend more time outside playing basketball with my brother.

A few years ago, when there was more money to spend and life was normal, before Covid and some of Dad's customers who had lost their jobs told him they couldn't afford to pay Dad to clean their pools anymore, Dad bought us a backboard and hoop and paid someone to install a tall metal pole on the side of the driveway so we could have our own basketball court. It was a court made of dirt and pebbles and broken shells, but still, we could imagine it as a basketball court.

My brother and I would shoot baskets from morning to night if Mom let us, but she says homework always comes first. Still, during the summer months, between part-time jobs delivering newspapers, cutting

by Bruce Black



Illustrated by Karen Donnelly

text © 2023 by Bruce Black, art © 2023 by Karen Donnelly

lawns, and helping Dad clean pools, we come pretty close to spending as much of the day as we can on the court. We practice all sorts of shots—hook shots, fade-away jumpers, foul shots, layups, shots from the corner—and try to sharpen our dribbling skills by cutting around each other, sending the ball through each other's legs, passing it behind our backs, learning to dribble without looking at the ball. I don't know what it is about holding a ball and sending it into the air and waiting for it to drop into the basket, but it feels like magic—all the problems of the world seem to fade away—and I feel like I'm the magician making the magic happen each time I arc the ball toward the basket and watch it fly toward its destination. Each time the ball leaves my hands feels like I've just discovered the secret of flight.

Dad once told me he felt pretty much the same way about cleaning pools. Well, almost the same. It was like being a magician, he said, turning the water from cloudy to clear, vacuuming debris off the bottom of the pool so the pool sparkled. It was one of the things Dad and I shared—the ability to see magic in things. Lately, though, it didn't seem like Dad saw a lot of magic anywhere. Yesterday he came home and told us he'd lost more customers to Covid, to job losses. I can tell he's worried when he comes home each night. He might think of himself as a magician with water, but he can't make the worry lines on his forehead or the new creases around his eyes disappear.

I squeeze past my brother to put in another layup. That's when I hear Dad's old pickup chugging around the corner. First, I hear the familiar engine *clunk-clunking-click, clunk-clunking-click*, and then comes the squeal of the tires as he takes the turn. It's earlier than when he usually arrives home, and there's still a lot of light left in the sky for a change. My brother and I step off the driveway onto the grass as Dad steers the pickup, with its faded decal on the door that says "Mike's Pool Service" and with dozens of yellow plastic jugs of chlorine in the back, toward the garage, and we wait for him to turn off the engine before going back to shoot baskets.

"Hey, guys!" Dad says as he gets out. His shoulders slump forward with fatigue, and he can't hide the worry in his eyes. He stands a moment by the side of the pickup to stretch his arms and catch his breath, and for a moment he closes his eyes. In that moment his face is caught in the fading rays of the sun, and the slant of light reveals a lot more creases and wrinkles than I remember.

"Want to shoot a few hoops, Dad?" I ask, knowing how much he loves basketball and thinking maybe it might cheer him up.

"Sure," he says, opening his eyes and smiling a weary smile. "Why not? We have a little time before dinner tonight, don't we?"

"I think so," I say.

Dad drops the car key into his jeans pocket, removes his bleached baseball cap and tosses it onto the grass, then unbuttons



mike's
POOL SERVICE

H-O-R-S-E IS A GAME IN WHICH EACH PLAYER HAS TO COPY THE BASKETBALL SHOT OF THE PREVIOUS PLAYER.



EVERY TIME THEY MISS, THEY GET A LETTER, STARTING WITH "H." IF THEY GET ALL THE LETTERS TO SPELL HORSE, THEY'RE OUT.



OK, BUT WHY "HORSE"?

MAYBE BECAUSE WE'RE SO GOOD AT IT!



AND BECAUSE HORSES ARE JUST SO WONDERFUL!

the top buttons on his short-sleeved shirt and reaches for the ball.

My brother bounce-passes the ball to him, and Dad catches it as if catching a ball is as natural to him as breathing.

"What about a game of H-O-R-S-E?" my brother asks.

"OK, but give me a chance to warm up," Dad says.

Dad used to play basketball in high school when he lived in Michigan, but that was a long time ago. I watch him aim at the basket. He always uses two hands to hold the ball, never just one the way my brother and I learned to shoot one-handers, and he's always careful to line up his body with the basket so that it's straight in front of him, not off to the side. I love watching Dad shoot. Each of his shots is perfectly measured so that the ball drops cleanly through the hoop and swishes the net. It's one of my favorite sounds.

After Dad warms up and says he's ready to start, the three of us shoot foul shots from the edge of the driveway to see who goes first. Dad tosses the ball toward the basket with an underhand motion that he learned years ago. It looks funny and old-fashioned, and I'd laugh but he sinks three in a row. Each time he holds the ball in both hands between his knees, bends his legs slightly, and looks up at the basket. It looks like he's a chicken getting ready to lay an egg. Then he swings the ball forward and back before lifting the ball and releasing it in a high arc, and through some sort of miracle it drops straight into the basket,

"You ready?" Dad asks, getting the ball.



"Yeah," I say.

My brother nods.

"OK," Dad says, "try this one."

Dad sets himself at the corner of the driveway. He's about twenty feet from the basket and tosses in a two-hander from chest high, which is how my brother and I try to make the basket, standing where Dad was standing, holding the ball with one hand on each side the way he held it, and aiming for the hoop. My shot goes in. My brother's bounces off the front of the rim.

"H for you," I say.

My brother shrugs as he jogs to retrieve the ball from the grass. "It's only one miss."

Next, Dad puts up a hook shot from the foul line, lifting his right knee and his right hand at the same time and pivoting the ball toward the basket. He misses this time, so it's my turn, and I go to the edge of the sidewalk, which is where I'd stand if we were playing in a gym and wanted to shoot from the corner, and toss the ball one-handed toward the basket from the side.

S-s-s-w-i-s-h-h-h!

"Whoa, what a shot!" Dad says.

My brother goes next. One-handed. Standing on the edge of the curb, just the way I stood, and pushing the ball into the air. It has enough height and distance but looks like it's going to fall short, only it reaches the front of the rim and clangs against the metal, bouncing a foot higher before dropping in. He turns and slaps me a high-five.

"You guys are hot," Dad says.

Dad isn't used to shooting one-handed. He looks uncertain about taking the shot from so far out. But he heaves the ball toward the basket and smiles when it falls through the hoop.

"Looks like I've still got the touch!" He does a little victory dance, kind of twirling on his toes and lifting his hands and waving them over his head, and he smiles in a way that I haven't seen him smile in a long time.

As daylight fades and it gets darker, each of us take shots from different spots on the court. I miss one of my shots, a long-range bomb from the corner where the sidewalk meets the driveway. My brother takes the lead. He loves to shoot bank shots off the backboard and run layups to the opposite side of the basket. He likes switching hands, too, using his left instead of his right, which is always a problem for me, but not for Dad, who stays in the game longer than me.

On another shot my brother wins the point using a two-handed underhand foul shot, which is the way Dad likes to shoot, but something distracts Dad before he takes the shot—the shadow of a bat fluttering above our heads, maybe, or the sudden sound of a car horn from a neighbor's driveway—and the ball goes wide a fraction of an inch, just enough for it to slip in and out again. It's strange because Dad never misses these shots. And I'm wondering now if he missed on purpose just to let my brother win.

"What about another game?" my brother asks, even though it's almost too dark to see the ball.

TRY THIS—IT'S MY TRIPLE DOUBLE
SOMERSAULT TWISTING FALL AWAY.
(SWISH!)

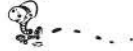


WHOA!
UMMM...

DON'T THINK
I CAN DO
THAT...



WE CAN TRY—PASS ME THAT
BALL AND MAKE WAY!



Just then the floodlight over the garage flashes on and off. That's Mom. She's inside the house flipping the switch to send us her signal that dinner is ready.

"Maybe tomorrow," Dad says. "I think your mom's waiting."

So, we go through the garage and step inside the den together. It smells like mac and cheese again, but that's OK. I love mac and cheese. My brother is still dribbling the ball on the linoleum floor. The sound echoes against the walls. Mom shouts from the kitchen, "Would someone please stop making a racket in the house!"

Dad swats my brother on the back of his head, a playful love tap, and my brother stops

dribbling and rolls the ball to the corner. The three of us head upstairs for dinner. It's nice to see Dad smiling again, as if the time he spent shooting baskets with us revived him and brought back his ability to laugh a little. For a short time we helped him forget about Covid and his customers getting sick and whether his business would survive the pandemic.

I know how rare it is for Dad to find time to play with my brother and me lately. I wish we could do this more often. I love playing ball, especially with Dad. When he's happy it feels like everything fits into place, including the basketball, which drops through the net without even touching the rim. *S-w-i-s-s-s-h-h-h-h!* 🐜



DAWN

by Candace Pearson

In the quiet time before dawn
our farm sleeps in a starry blanket.
Before it wakes with a yawn,

the cats dream of milking hour,
corn shivers in its jackets,
sun waits to turn on its power

to force me from my cozy bed.
Beneath my window, the roosters
crow, *We're ready to be fed.*

Rise and shine, I hear Papa call.
Waffles warm a brand new morning,
I curl up again, small as small—

until the moon hangs by a thread,
when I kick off my covers
to grumble, tumble out of bed.

Illustrated by Shawn Costello

Part 2

MESSAGE in a BOTTLE

by Susan Dickinson

In 1849, fifteen-year-old Christy Dooley leaves Ireland for America, stowing away aboard the St. John, a “famine ship” crowded with Irish families fleeing the miserable poverty and devastation caused by the Great Potato Famine. Christy has a crooked back, and as a “cripple” unable to work in the peat bogs like his father, could never have been more than a beggar in Ireland. But the penniless lad is determined to earn his fortune in America and to return with money to help his Ma and sister. Christy’s father is a cruel drunkard, but Christy’s Ma believes in her son. Although she has no idea of Christy’s plans, she gives him a medal of St. Christopher, the lad’s namesake and the patron saint of travelers. On the Galway docks, Christy strikes up a friendship with Blackie McClure, a giant of a man bound also for the new land. Blackie promises the “wee hunchback” that they will stick together, aboard ship and in America, too.

OVER THE NEXT month, Blackie protected the stowaway from bullies and snoops, and Christy, repeating what he’d read in the Galway newspapers, kept Blackie enthralled with incredible stories of gold just waiting to be had in California. The gruff

young docker shared his food with Christy, who in return showed him the alphabet and how to put the letters together to make words. Blackie gave Christy a small corner of his bunk in the ’tween deck, which was crowded with nearly a hundred people of all ages. Having grown up in a one-room country cottage, Christy could sleep like a baby just about anywhere. While the ship pitched and rolled, he dreamed sweet dreams of Ireland, where he walked tall and straight over the green hills at Clonmacnoise monastery, or along the lovely banks of the Silver River closer to home.

Blackie, on the other hand, couldn’t forget Ireland fast enough. He’d shake his head and proclaim, “St. Patrick or no, that island is full of snakes and vipers!” On more than one occasion he swore to Christy, “I’ll *never* go back to that bloody island.” Yet when Christy explained his plan to earn enough money to rescue his Ma and little sister, Blackie’s dark eyes would tear up.

“I don’t remember my Ma, hardly at all. You’re a lucky lad, you are.” And he’d wipe his eyes with his sledgehammer hand.

“Don’t go all mushy on me, Blackie!” Christy would tease him.

Snapping to, Blackie would grumble, “Not on your *life*, you crooked little Fenian!”

By the time they arrived at the coast of Massachusetts that fateful October morning, their friendship was solid.

“WAKE UP! WAKE UP! The ship’s in danger!” Blackie shook him roughly.

THE ’TWEEN DECK (SHORT FOR “BETWEEN DECK”) IS BELOW THE MAIN DECK AND USED FOR CARGO OR STEERAGE PASSENGERS. (AKA: THE CHEAP SEATS!)





Christy's eyes snapped open, and he sat up in alarm, sensing their peril at once. In the dim light he saw people all around him scrambling from their bunks. In an instant, their hushed chatter intensified to fearful shouting, as they dashed to gather up their meager belongings.

"What can we do?"

"Stick with me, lad," was all Blackie said. He stood at the foot of the bunk, both hands gripping the bunk posts for balance as the ship rocked wildly. Just then, with a terrible thud and shudder, the *St. John* heaved hard to port. Many standing in the narrow gangway were thrown to the floor.

"Are we sinking?" Christy yelled up to Blackie. It was impossible to believe. They were so close to America!

"Dunno. We gotta go up and find out," Blackie shouted above the din. "C'mon lad!"

"Wait!" Christy pleaded. "I've got to let my Ma know . . ."

"What? We got no time for letter writin', Christy!" Blackie grabbed Christy's arm and started to pull him off the bunk.

"No!" Christy shouted, in sudden command. "Give me that whiskey bottle you drank last night—and the stopper, too!"

Blackie released his grip on Christy and lifted the blanket, pulling out the nearly empty bottle.

"I was savin' a swig for when we arrived!" he complained.

"Well, don't save it! Drink it! Now!"

Blackie needed no more encouragement, and with one swallow, he downed the contents. He handed the bottle to Christy, who ripped the St. Christopher medal and chain from his neck and dropped it in.

"What good is that?" Blackie bellowed. Without waiting for an answer, he glanced



around and growled, "Come on, lad! Time's a wastin' here!" But he stood firmly planted, despite the pushes and shoves of the agitated horde pressing past him.

"Not knowin' is worse than knowin'!" Christy shouted. "Never hearin' a word about me will surely break my Ma's heart. If we're to die here, maybe someone ashore will find the bottle and let her know what happened." He rummaged in his roll and pulled out a wrinkled sheet of paper he had saved. It was a flier advertising the *St. John's* voyage. He rolled it up and shoved it into the bottle, on top of his medal.

Blackie, watching him tarry so, rolled his eyes in exasperation. Christy jammed the stopper down, and gripped the bottle tightly as, without another word, Blackie folded one massive arm around him, scooped him off the bunk, and forced his way through the pressing throng up the deck ladder. Just as they reached the steeply tilting deck, freezing water blasted through the floor and walls behind them, snuffing out the screams of the unlucky ones still below.

Up on the wind-whipped deck, panicked passengers slipped and stumbled about, frantically shouting for missing children, or searching desperately for a lifeboat, a barrel, a plank—anything to cling to as the doomed ship ripped and cracked apart. Blackie sprinted to the gunwale, with Christy still securely in his vicelike grip. In the blink of an eye, they were knocked overboard, along with dozens of others, by a monstrous wave that crashed down upon the deck.

THAT IS THE STORY of Christy and Blackie and the shipwreck, as related to me, Maggie Dooley, by my great-grandmother when she was nearly as old as I am now. I remember her saying that nearly two years after the wreck, in the summer of 1851, she was one of two little girls, sisters, playing on Sandy Beach on a hot and humid afternoon. The sun beat down, and the sky was a deep heavenly blue. The air was heavy and still, and only the cries of sea gulls pierced the quiet. On such an afternoon, it was easy to forget the malevolent violence of an October nor'easter. Indeed, the wreck of the *St. John* was the last thing on anyone's mind in Cohasset that day.

The girls were digging holes in the warm, white sand up near the dunes, searching for buried treasure. Their spades hit a curious, hard object, which they proceeded to uncover and lift from the hole. It was just an old whiskey bottle, but through the hazy glass they could see something inside, a paper cylinder and a metal object that clinked when they shook the bottle. They removed the stopper, pulled out the contents, and puzzled over the old flyer and the silver St. Christopher medal inscribed along the edge with "C. Dooley." Disappointed at not finding gold doubloons, they nevertheless brought their paltry treasure home to show their parents, who understood its potential significance at once.

The parents showed the intriguing find to town officials, who eventually managed to check the name against the list of passengers and crew of the *St. John*. There was no "C. Dooley" among them. Unfortunately, this

omission did not negate the possibility that C. Dooley had been on the *St. John*, for there were rumors that the ship's official register was not complete. But even if C. Dooley *had* been a passenger on that doomed ship, it was impossible to say whether he or she might now be among the dead or still among the living. In all the confusion of that awful day, anyone could have struggled ashore anywhere along the coast. So, by all accounts, the identity and whereabouts of the mysterious C. Dooley were questions that would very likely never be answered. Furthermore, there was no point in trying to locate family back in Ireland, for that country was in a state of complete disarray from the famine, not to mention that Dooleys were a dime a dozen. Since the unusual message in a bottle could never be delivered or even deciphered, one of the little girls was permitted to keep the flier, and the other, my great-grandmother, the medal.

AND YOU MAY

judge what happened subsequently to be a pure coincidence, but I am not so sure. Ten years after she found the medal, when she was twenty-one, my great-grandmother married a wealthy Irishman named Christopher Dooley from San Francisco. He and his business partner, another Irishman, whose name

I don't recall, were among the last lucky fellows to strike it rich in the California Gold Rush. It seems that in October of 1861 this Christopher Dooley was returning to America from a visit to Ireland, when he stopped at the port of Boston. With a few days to spare before he continued to San Francisco, he'd taken the stagecoach down to Cohasset. It was the anniversary of the *St. John* disaster, but on this October 7, the day was sunny and calm. The slender and slightly stooped young man had been strolling alone in Central Cemetery. As he was leaving through the gate at Joy Place, he encountered my great-grandmother, a noted beauty of her day. She was just arriving with her sister and a small contingent of villagers to pay their respects to the unknown, but not forgotten, victims. He

tipped his hat, and stood aside so she could pass through the narrow gate first. Just as she did so, he spotted the distinctive silver medal she was wearing as a brooch, pinned to her dress with a little black ribbon. He couldn't suppress a cry of surprise and recognition.

That was the start of a wonderful conversation, one that led to forty years of marriage, and to the next generation, and the next. Christy's message in a bottle had been delivered after all—not to his mother in Ireland, but to his future wife in America. 





“It was Mrs. May who first told me about them.”

THE BORROWERS (The Borrowers, Book 1) by Mary Norton
submitted by Arrietty
via Blab About Books, Chatterbox

“Before being terminated, I was Indian.”

INDIAN NO MORE by Charlene Willing McManis with Traci Sorell
submitted by Sonya P. via email

“Rain fell that night, a fine, whispering rain.”

INKHEART (Inkheart, Book 1)
by Cornelia Funke
submitted by Morning
via Blab About Books, Chatterbox

“I write this sitting in the kitchen sink.”

I CAPTURE THE CASTLE
by Dodie Smith
submitted by Ella M. of Minneapolis, MN

“On Friday, June 12, I woke up at six o’clock and no wonder; it was my birthday.”

THE DIARY OF A YOUNG GIRL
by Anne Frank
submitted by Lucy Smith of Detroit, MI

“The end of the world started when a Pegasus landed on the hood of my car.”

THE LAST OLYMPIAN I (Percy Jackson and the Olympians, Book 5)
by Rick Riordan
submitted by Arjun Mathur
of Fremont, CA

“Not every thirteen-year-old girl is accused of murder, brought to trial, and found guilty.”

THE TRUE CONFESSIONS OF CHARLOTTE DOYLE by Avi
submitted by Star Princess
via Blab About Books, Chatterbox

“There was a hand in the darkness, and it held a knife.”

THE GRAVEYARD BOOK
by Neil Gaiman
submitted by Book Kitten
of Kensington, MD

“In Mr. Kaplan’s studio is a needlepoint pillow, on a chair.”

THE MOZART SEASON
by Virginia Euwer Wolff
submitted by Taylor Roth of Buffalo, NY

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Take It Easy

Sailing Expressions We Use Every Day

by Janet J. Kosky

SINCE ANCIENT TIMES, people have been fascinated by the ocean and its lure of discovery, trade, or power. The sea was the major highway between cultures for thousands of years, and countless sailors braved its winds and waves. So it's not surprising that today our language is filled with words and phrases that originated with those adventurous souls who plied the great waterways.

Until railroads were built, oceans and rivers were the most efficient way of moving raw materials and goods from one country to another. When sailors entered a foreign port, they had to present passes to identify themselves and get permission to land. Today, all travelers to foreign countries are required to carry *passports* whether they arrive by boat, plane, or land vehicle.

Companies sent ships around the world to trade their cargoes and return with exotic goods in hopes of making a fortune. Each company had its own colorful flag to distin-

guish it from others. As a ship returned to its home port, these flags were hoisted high on the mast to signal a prosperous trip to the owners waiting on land. Now, when students ace a test at school, they might say they *passed with flying colors*, meaning they did very well indeed.

Some ship captains would smuggle, or sneak, their cargo into a country at a secret unloading point to avoid paying duty, or import taxes. On land, a lookout kept watch for the authorities and would signal the ship when the *coast was clear*, which came to mean that the path to complete any plan was free of obstacles.

In the seventeenth century, workers were badly needed for the plantations in the West Indies and American colonies. Stalkers would “nab” likely young lads, or “kids”—*kidnap* them—and sell them to sea captains who would take them across the Atlantic to labor as slaves or indentured servants, never to see their families again.

OF COURSE!
YOU NEED
A **PASS** TO
GET INTO
A FOREIGN
PORT.



IT'S SO
INTERESTING
TO LEARN
WHERE
WORDS AND
EXPRESSIONS
COME FROM.

Illustrated by Dan Bob Thompson



Then there were the pirates who preyed on other ships for loot and treasure. They could attack quickly, then disappear into the immense expanse of ocean. Pirates usually slaughtered the crew and took the ship and its cargo for bounty. Seeing the Jolly Roger flag on an approaching ship was anything but a happy omen for sailors of any nationality.

But sometimes pirates would not fly any flag until they could see the flag, or “colors,” of the ship they were stalking. Then they would raise the same flag, leading the unsuspecting sailors to believe the ship was friendly and allow it to get closer. When it was too late for the victims to escape, the pirates would raise their *true colors*, or show who they really were.

The phrase *to take the wind out of someone's sails*, meaning to deflate someone's optimism with surprising news, refers to a practice of pirates who would steer close by the ship they were chasing to block the wind from its sails. This slowed the fleeing ship, enabling the pirates to climb aboard.

Whether pirates ever really made their captives *walk the plank*, or this terrible fate was just an invention of storytellers, pirates did joke that their prisoners on the sea were welcome to “walk home” anytime they wished. Walking the plank has come to mean being forced into undertaking any dreadful action.

Sometimes pirates stranded, or marooned, survivors on a deserted island with no clothes,

THAT SAYING SHOULD BE: DON'T GIVE UP THE
SHIP UNLESS IT'S SUNK AND YOU'D LIKE TO
LIVE TO FIGHT ANOTHER DAY.



VERY SENSIBLE! BUT
NOT SO CATCHY.

food, or water. *Marooned* comes from the French word “marron,” meaning wild. In the seventeenth century, escaped slaves who hid in the forests of the West Indies were called Maroons by the French. *Strand* comes from an old English word for the land bordering a body of water. If a ship was beached, it would be helpless, or stranded.

Down through the ages, whoever ruled the oceans ruled the world. Having a powerful navy meant a nation could protect its shores, establish distant colonies, and defend its merchant fleet from pirates and enemy ships.

During the War of 1812, Captain James Lawrence, an American, was wounded in a battle with an English ship. As the crew carried him below deck, he told them, “*Don’t give up*

the ship!” He soon died, and in fact his ship was captured. But his words remain a rallying cry, urging anyone in a tough situation to hold on through the struggle and never surrender.

For those who lost their lives in a battle at sea, the ship’s flag was lowered to *half mast*, a custom practiced today on land to honor fallen members of the military or important leaders. The empty space above the flag signifies the invisible flag of death.

Life on board a sailing ship was not easy. Sailors suffered from scurvy, spoiled food, foul drinking water, and demanding and dangerous work. Below deck, sleeping quarters were crowded, dim, smelly, and rat infested. Cabin boys and new recruits were often mistreated by their superiors, and

punishments for disobedience were harsh.

Many sailors died from these conditions or from being exposed to diseases and epidemics in foreign lands. Shipmates said these unlucky ones went to *Davy Jones’s Locker*. Davy Jones is the spirit of the sea, and his locker is the bottom of the ocean, the final resting place for shipwrecks, sunken cargo, drowning victims, and people buried at sea. *Jones* may refer to the Biblical prophet Jonah, also known as Jonas, who attempted to escape God’s command to prophesy to the people of Ninevah by sailing in the opposite direction. Jonah’s ship became engulfed in a storm raised



by the divine wrath, endangering all aboard—until the crew tossed the reluctant prophet overboard. Davy may have morphed from the Old English “duffy,” meaning ghost. The “ghost of Jonah” took on various shapes and haunted many sailors who claimed to have seen him clinging to the rigging on the eve of a hurricane or shipwreck.

With the long hours of physical toil, sailors fell into their hammocks *pooped*, a term which today means exhausted. *Poop* comes from the Late Middle English word *pouppe*, which means the stern of a ship. A ship was said to be pooped when the towering waves of a gale broke over its stern or poop deck, exhausting its forward progress and placing it in danger of foundering.

Surprisingly, a lot of sailors didn’t know how to swim, and if one fell overboard and was hauled unconscious from the sea, he would be placed over a barrel and rolled back and forth in an effort to expel the water from his lungs. Nowadays if someone is *over a barrel* it means that he is under another person’s control, helpless and weak.

Whether shipmates got along with each other or not, they were *all in the same boat*, meaning that they shared the same hardships and depended on each other. It was important for



WE'RE IN THE
SAME BOAT!



GLAD WE DIDN'T
MISS THE BOAT!



LOOK AT ME KEEPING MY
HEAD ABOVE WATER!

everyone to do his job well regardless of any personal disagreements, or everyone would suffer.

After reaching their destination, sailors might have a short leave on land. It was their responsibility to be back on board when the ship was due to depart, or they would *miss the boat* and be on their own to find a way home again. The phrase has come to mean losing out on any good opportunity.

Sailors working on three- or four-masted ships were surrounded by ropes attached to sails, anchors, and booms. New recruits were tested to make sure they knew where each rope was and how to operate it, before being allowed to carry out orders for maneuvering the vessel. They had to *learn the ropes*, or understand all of the duties involved in their new job.

Sailors worked the ropes in teams. If there was too much tension on a line they were hauling, they might be ordered to *take it easy*, meaning to ease up on the tautness of the rope. We use the phrase now to tell someone to relax or not work so hard.

Because so many operations of the ship were controlled by ropes, sailors had to know how to tie a variety of knots. A hitch was a common knot used to keep lines from slipping. If an

event went off *without a hitch*, there was nothing hindering or snagging it and all went smoothly.

In the days before loudspeakers, a lot of information on board was conveyed with bells or whistles. Mealtimes were announced by a deckhand blowing on a pipe. Those who

wanted their food *pipin' hot* arrived immediately. A pipe was also

blown at night to signal people to go below deck and be quiet so the crew could sleep.

Pipe down is used to tell a crowd of people to lower the noise level.

The phrase *knock off*, meaning to quit work for the day, originated in Ancient

Rome. Slaves powered boats by rowing, and in order

to row in unison, one person would beat on a drum or a hollow block of wood with a mallet. When it was time for a rest, the person knocked on another block that made a different sound and signaled the rowers they could take the pressure off their oars.

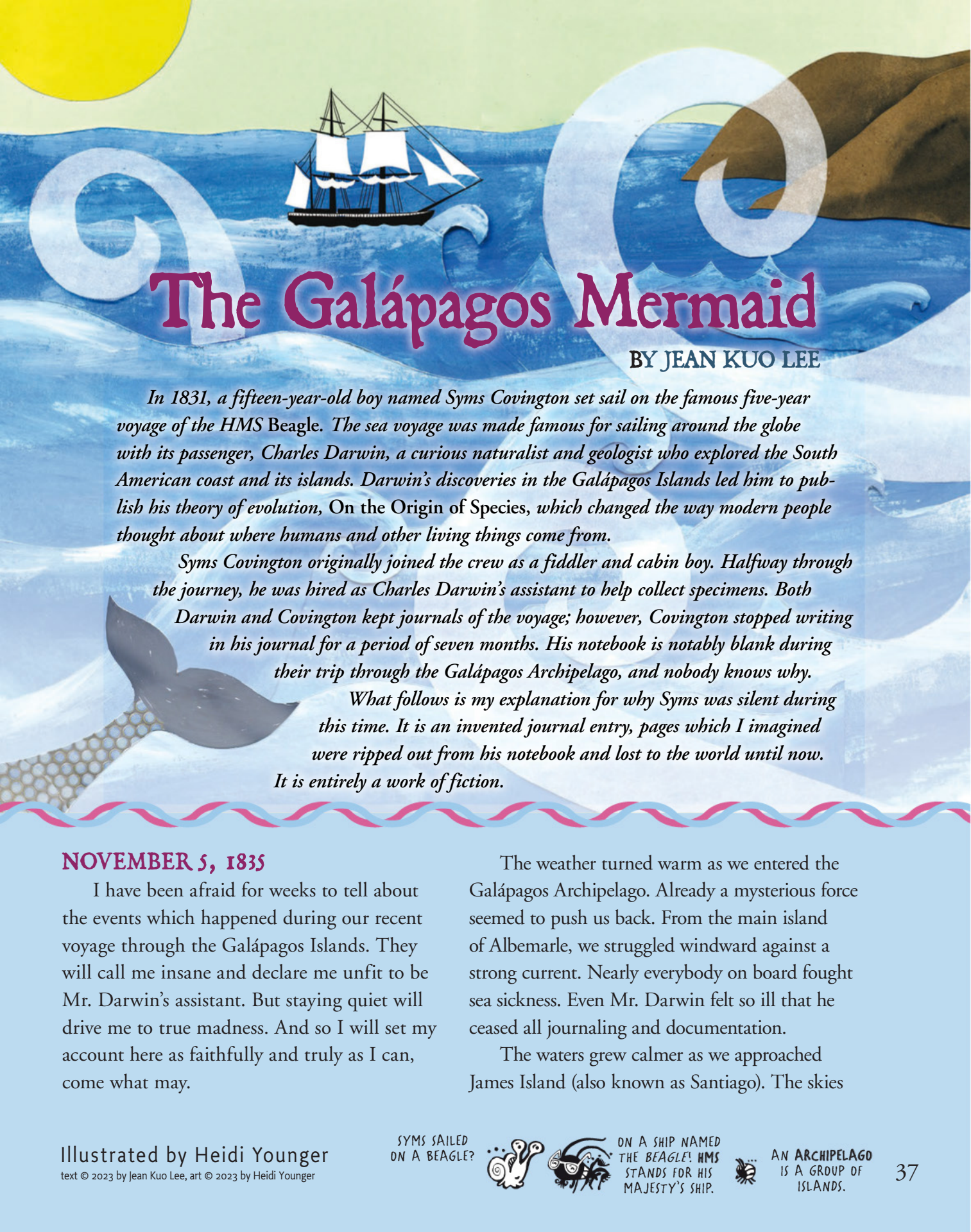
The next time you catch yourself using an expression like *smooth sailing* or *keeping your head above water*, think of those bold souls who once defied the forces of the sea. The colorful phrases they used every day, on voyages filled with danger and adventure, are a legacy reflected in our own words, hundreds of years later. 🦋



PIPE DOWN!
KNOCK IT OFF!
HA HA!



ALL THIS SHIP TALK IS
MAKING ME SEASICK...
BLURRRRG.



The Galápagos Mermaid

BY JEAN KUO LEE

In 1831, a fifteen-year-old boy named Syms Covington set sail on the famous five-year voyage of the HMS Beagle. The sea voyage was made famous for sailing around the globe with its passenger, Charles Darwin, a curious naturalist and geologist who explored the South American coast and its islands. Darwin's discoveries in the Galápagos Islands led him to publish his theory of evolution, On the Origin of Species, which changed the way modern people thought about where humans and other living things come from.

Syms Covington originally joined the crew as a fiddler and cabin boy. Halfway through the journey, he was hired as Charles Darwin's assistant to help collect specimens. Both Darwin and Covington kept journals of the voyage; however, Covington stopped writing in his journal for a period of seven months. His notebook is notably blank during their trip through the Galápagos Archipelago, and nobody knows why.

What follows is my explanation for why Syms was silent during this time. It is an invented journal entry, pages which I imagined were ripped out from his notebook and lost to the world until now. It is entirely a work of fiction.

NOVEMBER 5, 1835

I have been afraid for weeks to tell about the events which happened during our recent voyage through the Galápagos Islands. They will call me insane and declare me unfit to be Mr. Darwin's assistant. But staying quiet will drive me to true madness. And so I will set my account here as faithfully and truly as I can, come what may.

The weather turned warm as we entered the Galápagos Archipelago. Already a mysterious force seemed to push us back. From the main island of Albemarle, we struggled windward against a strong current. Nearly everybody on board fought sea sickness. Even Mr. Darwin felt so ill that he ceased all journaling and documentation.

The waters grew calmer as we approached James Island (also known as Santiago). The skies

Illustrated by Heidi Younger

text © 2023 by Jean Kuo Lee, art © 2023 by Heidi Younger

SYMS SAILED
ON A BEAGLE?



ON A SHIP NAMED
THE BEAGLE! HMS
STANDS FOR HIS
MAJESTY'S SHIP.



AN ARCHIPELAGO
IS A GROUP OF
ISLANDS.

cleared, and there was only the force of the hot sun blazing down on us. There, five of us landed on a black sand beach with barely any food or water, where we were to wait until the *Beagle* returned from resupplying at Chatham Island.

I began to feel sick as soon as we set foot on that dry, arid island. Nearly every tree was leafless, so we stood under the heat with no rest.

"I feel strange," I said.

"Covington, you're feverish. Look at your face. It's all red," Mr. Darwin said.

We quickly found a place to pitch our tents not far from the beach. But I found it hotter inside the tent than out in the open, where at least the breeze could blow and cool my pounding head. We found a small spring close by with a pitiful amount of fresh water, but it was enough to moisten my parched throat for that day.

The next morning the men hiked into the interior and higher parts of the island without me. They feared I was suffering from heat-stroke. I stayed behind at our camp watching large yellow lizards crawling out from their burrows, fighting over cacti, which I suspect was their main water source.

Still feverish, I set off midday toward the beach to get fresh water from the little spring. The waves swelled onto the beach repeatedly, like an arm raking the shore. Before I could reach the spring, an unusually long wave surged and broke over our only fresh water supply. It felt like an evil trick. The island did not seem to welcome us.

The dark sand was very hot even through the thick soles of my boots. With no water

or shade to enjoy, I removed my heavy boots at the edge of the surf and waded into the ocean. The water cooled my fever, but my head was still clouded and thick with heat.

I thought I heard singing. A thin ribbon of a girl's voice wove itself through the drone of waves on the shore. After a few moments of scanning the cove, I realized I was not alone. Someone or something was staring at me



HERE, DRONE REFERS TO A LOW,
REPETITIVE SOUND. H'MMMMMMMM.



from afar. A figure sat upon an outcropping of rock that jutted into the ocean. I thought it had to be the girl I'd heard singing. I could see her long, black hair and beautiful, tanned skin. But, to my astonishment, waist down she had a long tail like that of an exotic fish.

I stared slack jawed for a few minutes, refusing to believe my eyes. This mysterious creature seemed to be sunning herself upon

the rock. Every twenty seconds or so she flicked her tail, and the scales glistened and sparkled in the sun in radiant hues of blue, purple, and orange.

I had to get a closer look. How many sailors have mistaken sea lions for merfolk! I walked along the sliver of dark red beach between us. The surf kept my feet from burning.



The closer I approached the more she looked back and forth between me and the foaming waters, poised to flee. I didn't want to scare her, but I needed to see beyond a doubt that I was not imagining her.

The beach ended at the cliff. I would have given up, but she still sat there in plain view.

I took a dangerous chance by climbing the rocky ledges that skirted around the cliff. The waves dashed the rocks beneath me, and I lost sight of her as I traversed the cliff wall. When I finally emerged onto the outcropping, she was gone. I was utterly disappointed, but also relieved. It meant the fever was making me dream wild things.

I rested for a few moments on the rock. To my dismay I saw a dark head bobbing in the water just a few yards beyond. I squinted to make sure my eyes were not playing games. It was her. The mermaid.

She looked at me with big, green eyes and reminded me of a girl with dark hair I knew from England. How fair and mysterious mermaids are!

As the waves continued to dash against the rocks, I dove in. It was foolish to swim with pounding surf, yet I was drawn as if against my will.

The cold water shocked me, and the salt stung my eyes. I kept afloat in the water, searching for the mermaid, and spotted her close by. She looked at me curiously, her hair wet and plastered to her cheek.

"Please," I shouted. "Who are you? Where do you live?" I spat the salty ocean water out of my mouth. She only looked at me blankly.

Only later did I realize she probably did not speak English.

My teeth began to chatter, and I felt chilled. She dove beneath the water, and I panicked. I wanted some sort of proof of what I'd seen. I knew that even now the men were collecting specimens of unusual flowers, birds, and lizards on the island somewhere. My contribution would be *this creature*, but it was proving harder to follow her now that she went beneath the sea.

I swam out to where she had disappeared and ducked my head beneath the water, trying to keep my eyes open. All was murky and dull, and I could see nothing. The burst of energy that kept me swimming began to flag. I grew weak and numb with cold but dared not turn back to the rocks for fear of being pounded onto them. The shore felt too far off as well. I fought a dizzy feeling and regretted my actions. I must have fainted because that is all I remember.

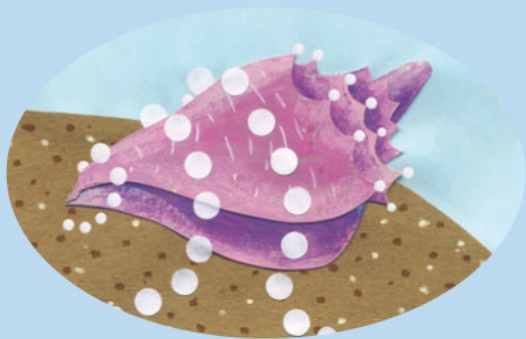
When I awoke I did not know how I got to the beach. My clothes were still moist from the water, but my hair had dried. My skin felt burned, so I must have lain in the sun for a while.

It wasn't until I sat up that I saw a beautiful conch nestled in the sand next to me filled with fresh water. I drank every drop but had nobody to thank, for the beach was empty, no creature in sight. I turned the giant shell in my hands, and it sparkled in the sun with the same iridescence as the mermaid's scales. I was in awe. The artistry was immaculate: pearls ranging from tiny beads to large globes



studded the conch in spiraling patterns. It was clearly a work of a highly developed underwater civilization. In a daze I walked back to camp, evidence in hand.

“DID YOU BUY that last month at Peru?” Mr. Darwin asked that night when the men had all returned and we were sitting around the fire eating tortoise soup.



Thankfully they had brought tortoises, wood, and water back from their excursion.

I fingered the pearls delicately inset upon the conch. “No, I found this here on the island. Besides, I haven’t money to buy something like this.”

“Well, I dare say, this cove has been used by pirates before,” Mr. Darwin answered with raised brows. “You’re lucky finding something like that. You could fetch a pretty price at market. It could be worth a fortune.”

My mouth hung open. I prepared to tell him about my mermaid encounter, but no words came out. The moment passed me by. Mr. Darwin took out his journal and began recording his notes on the specimens he had found that day.



IRIDESCENCE IS
SHIMMERING WITH
DIFFERENT COLORS. SO
PRETTY!



I told nobody about the mermaid with dark hair and green eyes. It was so far-fetched a tale that nobody would believe me. I was only just recovering from my fever.

Perhaps it had all been a dream.

OVER THE NEXT few days we collected numerous samples of finches, lizards, tortoises, flowers, and other specimens. An American whaling ship anchored in our cove and gave us three casks of water and a bucket

of onions, saving us from having to hike inland for fresh water. One of their sailors kindly warned us of this cove, saying there had been odd sightings through the years, reports of creatures they had never seen before.

"Indeed, the lizards swim here. I saw them the other day," Mr. Darwin remarked.

"Not lizards," the sailor said. "I speak of merfolk: half human, half fish."

Mr. Darwin laughed heartily. "That would be the discovery of the century!"

But the sailor did not laugh back. His last words to us rang in my mind for a long time afterward. He said, "Sailors know that if you see a mermaid, a storm is coming."

AT LAST THE *Beagle* returned and sent in her boats to retrieve us from the cove. We brought our bounty of specimens with us happily onto the ship, where we were eager to move on from the hot island. We had collected enough birds to keep us busy for weeks skinning and studying their variations. Mr. Darwin was astonished to discover that the finches we caught in the Galápagos differed from island to island, yet each variety was constant on its own island. He especially marveled at the aquatic lizards.

"Could humans have adapted to the water in a similar fashion as the lizards?" I questioned.

"What do you mean, Covington?" he asked. "You aren't talking about merfolk, are you? The sailors speak rubbish. Nobody has ever proven the existence of mermaids, and I suspect nobody shall."

I considered the case closed. We prepared to sail on from James Island. The skies were clear, and the horizons calm. Captain Fitzroy said we were to embark in the morning.

THAT NIGHT AS I slept in our vessel, I was awoken by the wind howling through the rigging and the waves beating against the hull. I tied down my belongings, gripped the bedstead, and wondered at the surprise storm.

"All hands on deck!" a sailor yelled through the cabin door. "The wind is blowing

us into the island, and the captain says we're to hoist the sails immediately and steer the ship out to sea. Pray we don't run aground!"

We began to pitch back and forth even before we could raise the sails. The wind and waves hammered our vessel, growing more violent every minute. It was clear that any chance of sailing out of the storm was gone. We were trapped near the rocky shore. If the wind pushed us any further in, the shallow coast of James Island would rip the bottom right off the *Beagle*.

"Batten down the hatches!" the captain yelled as the waves gushed over the sides and flowed below deck.

I took out the conch with shaking hands. It glowed with an unearthly greenish light, as if it belonged deep under the mysterious sea. The sailor's words echoed in my mind: *If you see a mermaid, a storm is coming*. I carried it up to the deck even as I was jostled across the creaking planks of wood.

The winds roared, and I could see Captain Fitzroy yelling into the spray as the sea surged. The angry crash of sea foam swallowed the sounds of his voice, and I heard only distant shouts that were carried away by the wailing wind.

I teetered and fell but stood back up, grabbing any rail I could to keep from being pitched overboard into the wild and hungry waters. Salt water pelted my face like many shards of glass. I was overcome by the pushing and the pulling of forces that sought to turn my life upside down. Then, not wanting any more of it, I threw the conch into the monstrous ocean.



ROILING MEANS VIOLENT
AGITATION, TURBULENCE.
CREDIBLE MEANS
RELIABLE, TRUTHFUL.



BUT TRULY, THERE
AREN'T ANY MERMAIDS.
OH, NO?

Within seconds the winds quieted. The ship steadied, and the waters ceased their roiling. The sailors released their death grips on the rails and rigging as we regained stillness and wondered aloud what it was all about. What kind of squall was that? And what made it go away?

THAT WAS TWO weeks ago and I have been thinking upon the same questions all this time. After careful search of my memory—of the mysterious storm, the conch, the figure I saw on the beach—I have come to my journal ready to account for it as a credible witness. Sea people are a real species deserving of further exploration. Myths about them abound in every culture. Surely scientists need only double their efforts to discover these rare and mysterious creatures. 🐙

Reflection

by Raven Howell

Is that me or a mermaid
waving in blue water
where a fish blows bubbles in my hair
and the sun shines sparkles on my cheek?



Illustrated by Estelle Stroud

text © 2023 by Raven Howell, art © 2023 by Estelle Stroud



WINNERS JANUARY 2023 STORY CONTEST Challenge

First prize 10 and under

Ahmed Salman, age 9
Seven Hills, OH

Escape the Elevator Challenge

Bob and Bobby's jobs were to search buildings for anything valuable before the construction crew knocked them down.

One day Bob and Bobby were doing their job when Bob decided to take the elevator down to the ground floor. The building was due to collapse in forty minutes. On their way down, the elevator stopped. The lights went out. Bobby tried to press the emergency button, but the power had gone out, and the telephone was not working.

They thought it was a temporary power outage, but after waiting for thirty minutes they decided to get out. Bob knew there was a hatch at the top of the elevator. The problem was that the elevator hatch was too high to reach, but with Bobby's help, Bob managed to open the hatch.

The elevator shaft was very dark. Bob started climbing the ladder that was mainly used for maintenance. Bobby followed. They could already feel the vibrations of the building every time the wrecking ball hit it. They could barely stay on the ladder when they reached the first floor. Now they somehow had to get to the other side of the door and make it out of the building before it collapsed.

They pushed and kicked at the door, but it wouldn't budge. Bob and Bobby felt along the wall for anything that they could use to break open the door. Then suddenly Bobby remembered there was a crowbar in a compartment back in the elevator specifically for breaking elevator doors.

Because Bobby was in such a hurry, he slid down the ladder instead of climbing down. Once at the bottom of the ladder, he jumped into the broken elevator. He searched the elevator and then found the compartment with the crowbar. He took the crowbar and rushed up the ladder to where Bob was waiting for him. Together they wedged the crowbar between the door and its side. Slowly, the door was pushed aside just enough for them to slip through. They ran down the stairs and outside the building just as it collapsed behind them.

First prize 11 and up

Rockham Parrino, age 11
Cleveland, OH

A Day with Light

I was in bed thinking about the past, a time of sunshine, sports, riding my bike, but that stuff was gone. Those things were in the light, a place that is lost in time.

"Jack, come to the kitchen. I made breakfast," yelled my mother.

Frantically, I hopped off my bed and scrambled to the kitchen. In my mother's room I heard the news on TV. She always forgot about the TV because of her busy work taking care of the bunker.

My brother, Liam, and my mother were sitting at the counter discussing radiation levels. I tried to ignore them because I hated radiation talk. On the table were some dumplings and toast. I sat down, and then I heard Mom whisper to Liam, "Today is the day."

Liam's eyes went wide open, and he nodded very slowly.

I was kinda confused and thought, Whaaaaaat? But then I remembered the days of sunshine. However, the thoughts of torment and bloodshed came over me, bombs and guns giving people no chance. I was afraid of the outside.

"Jack, are you OK?" Liam firmly said with a stern face. "You have not eaten anything."

I stutter, "Oh, umm, I was er . . . thinking."

I was reading a book when Mom said, "Come here, Jack. It's time to go."

I knew what was coming, but I knew that I had to do it. I followed Mom down the tunnels until we arrived at the stairs. I shuddered as I carefully walked up the stairs and then asked, "Where is Liam?"

"He's already out," stated Mom.

When we finally got to the big door, I closed my eyes in fear as Mother switched the entrance lever, ready for what was beyond the door. Instead, I saw beautiful trees and people. I mean, it was hard to see them, but I could

see every detail. The kids and parents flooded out of their bunkers and rushed out to play. I was crying hard and hugging Mom. All she did was smile at me and say, "Now go play with your brother."

Second prize 10 and under

Vizcaya Labuda, age 8
Cleveland, OH

The Missing Piece

"Where is it?" Mina Revert cried, frustrated. She was standing at the dining table, working on a puzzle. Mina could not find the last piece.

"What's this?" asked Mina's little brother, Robert. He held up a slip of paper.

"Give it to me," Mina snapped. She snatched it from Robert. "Learn a lesson to get it back, Mina. What's that supposed to mean?"

"Maybe it means to not be mean to me," complained Robert.

"SHUT UP!" Mina yelled. "H'mm . . . a lesson."

That night, Mina thought about the note. She soon developed a theory that "it" was the puzzle piece.

A loud alarm awakened her. Mina had fallen asleep during her little thinking session.

Mina decided not to worry about the paper and went on with her day. At school, she read a book about two really selfish girls.

"They're so mean!" Mina said. Suddenly, something began to nag at the back of her mind. There were times when she, too, was selfish. Mina's feet grew heavier and heavier as the day dragged by. Maybe she should change her attitude.

After what seemed like a million years, there were five minutes left in Mina's last and favorite class, science. Her class was making slideshows for a project. Mina made her way over to one of her classmates, Sonali Mader.

"Give me your pencil," Mina demanded. "I left mine in my locker."

"Oh, sure," Sonali said kindly, "I'd be happy to help." Just then, Sonali's kindness made Mina realize that

she shouldn't be so mean. She rarely let anyone borrow her pencil. She looked at Sonali.

"I'm sorry for being so rude. Thanks for the pencil." She smiled and returned to her desk.

After school, Mina gave Robert a huge hug and apologized for her intolerable behavior. She felt much better after the hug.

That night, as Mina got into bed, she noticed the puzzle piece on her nightstand. She smiled and made a silent vow to never be so mean again.

Second prize 11 and up

Miranda Mumme, age 11
Hillsdale, MI

The Hodgepodge Racer

Once, not so long ago, there was a boy named James, who desperately wanted a bike. As his parents were, sadly, too poor to buy him one, he went to the nearby junkyard and pieced together a hodgepodge bike from the leftovers of junked cycles.

One day, word reached him about a race. He decided to enter, because first prize was a new bike. He practiced hard, learning all sorts of tricks like sharp turns, riding with no hands, and even riding on one wheel.

At the starting line, James glanced around at the other riders. All of their bikes were shiny and new. He looked down at his own rusty, hodgepodge bike and felt his cheeks grow hot. Although he knew that his chances of winning were slim, he felt compelled to try.

As the racers lined up, the judge began speaking through a megaphone. "There will be three stages of the race," he said, "the track, the off-road, and the obstacle course."

Because of all his practice, the track and off-road were no problem for James, and he easily overtook all the others riders. Then, he heard a hiss. He glanced down and gasped. His front tire had popped!

Oh no! thought James. I can't stop now! Recalling the one-wheel training he'd done back home, he pulled himself together. With a grin, he jerked the handlebars up and charged toward the first obstacle: the ramp. Because it wasn't too steep, getting up it was easy, but the landing nearly shattered what was left of his bike. As he squeaked and creaked through the other obstacles, he could hear the other riders gaining on him.

The final obstacle was a narrow bridge across a stream. James wobbled precariously and almost fell, but he righted himself and broke the finish line with his flat, hodgepodge tire in the air!

As the judge shook his hand and congratulated him, James grinned from ear to ear. He had won!

Third prize 10 and under

Haadi Nouman, age 10
Westlake, OH

A Challenging Rescue

"Let's go home," Liam said to his little sister, Flora, after their art class one Saturday morning. "We're late for lunch."

The night before, it had snowed hard. They trudged to their cozy home on Adelaide Street, passing through an empty construction site. Suddenly, Liam heard a loud thud. He turned around only to see that Flora was gone. His sister had fallen into a deep hole. "Help!" she yelled. "Get me out!"

Liam looked around in despair, but no one was in sight.

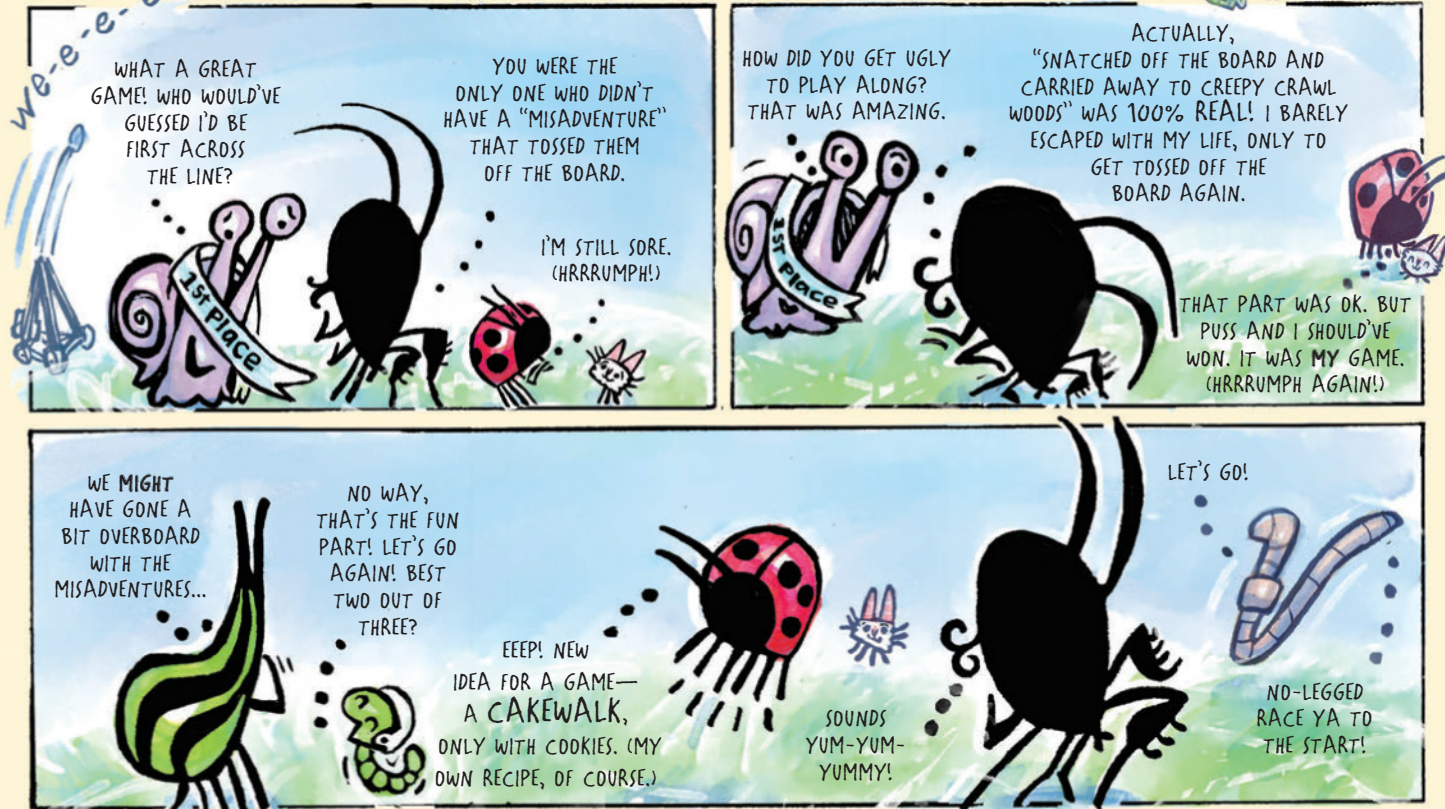
"Climb up the sides!" Liam shouted. His sister tried climbing up the hole, but with every step, she slipped down the hole. Then, he saw a humongous tree nearby. He grasped the longest tree branch and broke it off with a crack. He extended it to Flora. "Get hold of the tree branch!" Liam pleaded.

She reached for the branch, but it wasn't close enough. "I can't reach it!" she responded.

Liam saw a store in the distance and decided to get help. It was far, so he needed something to mark his way. He shuffled through his backpack and noticed some paint cans from his art class. I could use those paints to mark my way, Liam thought.

Liam staggered to the mart with a long trail of red paint behind him. He looked through the window. The lights were

Cricket & Ladybug: Game Weee! On!



off, and all the shelves were bare. A Closed sign was on the door. Frustrated, he trailed back to Flora hopelessly.

Suddenly, he had a wonderful idea. He knotted his scarf, jacket, and hat to make a long rope. Liam threw the rope into the hole and leaned down so Flora could grab it. Just then, a pile of snow tumbled down and almost buried Flora!

"Are you OK?" Liam panicked.

"I'm fine," came a cold, shaky voice.

Liam leaned down until Flora caught the rope. He then carefully pulled her up. Liam smiled. He had been wearing his rescue plan for the entire time.

They hugged and after walking for what felt like forever, their cozy red house was finally in sight.

Third prize 11 and up

Ming Wei Yeoh, age 17
Chanhassen, MN

To Love a Father

Malachi had always thought that Papa resembled one of the Greek statues—the kind born to rule a garden or museum hall, all powerful shapes and shadows cut from perfect, indestructible stone. It wasn't the godlike beauty or chiseled muscles that they held in common. Papa's nose was shaped like a radish, his back hunched and twisted. Instead, it was the milky silence of their eyes, that shared, marble quality that drew Papa nearer to the species of statues than of humans.

From the doorway, Malachi watched his father's back rise and fall. Ginger, the family cat—dead for hours now—lay curled in his arms. Though Papa's face was hidden, the stuttering rhythm of his shoulders gave away his tears.

For whatever reason, Malachi ached to see those hard eyes, which had only ever burned with indifference for him, and to lend his support to Papa. He yearned to express his love, to show that he cared for his father as he grieved.

But how?

Whether he cried over a kitten or not, this was still Papa, the statue of a man who had never even flashed a smile toward his son, let alone welcomed his affection. What gesture of Malachi's might he accept? As he slumped against the wall, Malachi thought and thought. Should he take it upon himself to prepare a lavish dinner for Papa tonight? Or heave Papa's toolbox out back and try to fix that old leaky pipe he was always going on about? Malachi strained his mind until it hurt, and until Papa's sobs had subsided to a quiet, lonely sound.

Malachi peeked back into the kitchen. He saw how the candlelight made Papa's muscles look even more fearsome, his great arms even more brutish; to anyone else, he was the picture of power and capability. But to Malachi, he was just a big, softhearted man, who, at the moment, simply needed his son's unconditional love and support—no frills or grandeur necessary.

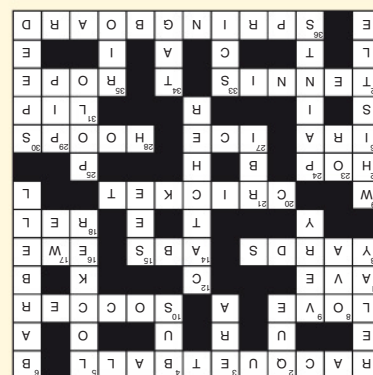
Malachi crossed the kitchen and hugged his father. Even without seeing, he could feel those stony eyes fill with warmth.

Honorable Mention

Kritika Chahar, age 11, Cleveland, OH. **Lylah J. Clay**, age 14, Casper, WY. **Niko Constantinou**, age 9, Westlake, OH. **Ryan Coppa**, age 9, Shaker Heights, OH. **Adela Garcia**, age 11, Chandler, AZ. **Eden Hitchcock**, age 11, Brandon, SD. **Danah Jang**, age 10, Westlake, OH. **Amielle Johnson**, age 9, Cincinnati, OH. **Gabriel Atticus Kantz-Torok**, age 8, Parma Heights, OH. **Jaslene Kwack**, age 12, Lisle, IL. **Jenna Nemr**, age 10, Westlake, OH. **Sylvia Pine**, age 11, Chicago, IL. **Maryn Smith**, age 12, Tulsa, OK.

To see more winning Cricket League entries, visit our website:
cricketmagkids.com/contests

Solution to Crossbird Puzzle



Acknowledgments continued from inside front cover

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NEW STORY CONTEST: PET

Ladybug and Pussywillow held each other close as they read about Scott, the beloved dog of the boy in "Dove Watch." Pets require lots of care, but their devotion and funny antics also bring us much happiness. For this month's contest, Ladybug would love to curl up with her magical pet kitty as they read your best story featuring a pet or animal companion.

Will you write about a cuddly kitten? A talkative parrot? How about a pet snake or iguana, or a tarantula or even a skunk? You might tell about getting or choosing a pet, or running a pet-sitting service in your neighborhood, or finding a lost pet. Will your pet be a bundle of energy that wakes you up too early in the morning and always gets into trouble? Or a furry hero whose alertness saves the day? Perhaps you will write about an animal competition, like a dog show or agility training, or preparing your "pet" horse or cow for the county fair or 4-H. You could even imagine a futuristic robotic pet or a pet you'd like to have someday.

Whether you write about taking your new puppy to obedience class, caring for the hermit crabs in your science classroom, or organizing a pet parade, nobuggy in Cricket Country will bark at the mailbox when he delivers your best story—of 350 words or less—about a pet or animal companion.

Contest Rules

1. Your contest entry must be your very own original work. Ideas and words should not be copied.
2. Your entry *must* be signed by your parent or guardian, stating that it is your own work, that no help was given, and that *Cricket* has permission to publish it in the magazine and on our website.
3. Be sure to include your name, age, and full address on your entry.
4. Only one entry per person, please.
5. If you want your work returned, enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope for each entry.
6. Your entry must be received by April 25, 2023.
7. Send entries to **Cricket League**, P.O. Box 300, Peru, IL 61354. (No faxes or email submissions, please!)
8. We will publish winning entries in the September 2023 issue and on the *Cricket* website.



THE IDEA THAT girls can be athletes doesn't seem strange to us today, but in ancient Greece, it was very unusual indeed. Middle- and upper-class women and girls rarely left their homes. They spent their days cooking, weaving, and running the household—and that was about all the running they did! But my friend Nancy Gordon tells me that they weren't left out of the fun completely.

While today's athletic events are held for fun and glory, ancient games served as a kind of gift to the gods and goddesses, a way of worshipping them. Girls weren't allowed to participate in the ancient Olympic Games, which were held in honor of Zeus, the king of the Greek gods. But they did have their own athletic competitions every four years, and their games were called the Heraia, in honor of Zeus's wife, Hera.

The Heraia took place at Olympia, site of the Olympics. Its only event was a footrace, with the girls competing in three different age groups. Participants used the same racecourse as the boys and men, but they ran one hundred feet less than the male athletes. And while men and boys competed nude, girls wore short tunics that left the right shoulder and part of the chest bare. Like the men who won Olympic contests, victorious girls received a crown of olive leaves, but they also won a portion of a cow that was sacrificed to Hera. And they were allowed to set up statues of themselves in the Heraion, an area sacred to Hera. These statues were dedicated to the goddess, providing a pleasant gift for her and ensuring that people would remember the girl's victory. After all, every athlete wants a little personal glory—even the ancient ones!

Old Cricket



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